

"Race" and Racism

The Development of Modern Racism in America

R. Perry

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"RACE" AND RACISM

THE DEVELOPMENT OF
MODERN RACISM IN AMERICA

RICHARD J. PERRY



"Race" and Racism

Other books by Richard J. Perry

Western Apache Heritage: People of the Mountain Corridor
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

Apache Reservation: Indigenous Peoples and the American State
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).

From Time Immemorial: Indigenous Peoples and State Systems
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

Five Key Concepts in Anthropological Thinking
(Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).

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Printed in the United States of America.

To my family, with love.

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Preface

When I first considered this book, I wondered whether the topic of “race” was a dead issue. Genetic research, after all, has demonstrated that “race” within the human species has no biological validity. And I assumed that few people would argue, in the face of such evidence, that to maintain the fiction of “race” serves any positive purpose. That, it seems, was naïve. The idea of “race” has shown as tenacious a resistance to scientific knowledge as it has to social ethics or moral concerns.

As Michael Banton and others have pointed out, we face a dilemma even when we critique the idea.¹ To use the term “race” is to perpetuate the implication that “race” is real. C. Loring Brace, in his excellent book *Race is a Four-Letter Word*, notes that “race is not only a useless concept but also is positively pernicious.”² On the other hand, it is difficult to engage in a serious discussion of something that does not exist—although it is not impossible, as many erudite scholars and theologians have shown over the ages. On one level, “race” certainly does exist. It remains an aspect of “conventional wisdom.” It exists to the same extent that Santa Claus exists in the hearts and minds of many people, though with far more sinister consequences. “Race” is an idea that will not go away, at least for now. To acknowledge this problem—without necessarily solving it—I have, like others, elected to use the term “race” in quotes.

Even casual attention to the mass media in the United States is enough to demonstrate that “race” remains a compelling issue in the public domain. In the late 1990s, President Clinton called for a “national dialogue on race.” The lengthy series of discussions that ensued satisfied very few. In the first years of the twenty-first century we have also had discussions about the merits of differing medical treatments for people of different “races,” as if “races” constituted distinct biological populations. We saw the Supreme Court of the United States rule that although it is permissible for universities to take “race” into consideration for student admission, “racial quotas” violate the Constitution. And every so often, someone in the media alleges some inherent “racial” difference in athletic abilities.

Perhaps approaching the most bizarre aspects of the public discussion, many conservatives who oppose affirmative action argue that attempts to redress the consequences of historical “racial” discrimination are unacceptable because they refer explicitly to “race.” And on December 4, 2006, the Supreme Court heard the case of *Meredith v. Jefferson County*. This county in Kentucky had managed to overcome a history of school segregation by encouraging a more balanced distribution of students, with the overwhelming support of the community. Attorneys for the plaintiff objected to the use of “racial” considerations in the effort to integrate schools. On June 28, 2007, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in a 5 to 4 decision, effectively disallowing this county’s efforts at desegregation.

Despite this new level of fastidiousness half a century after the historic Supreme Court decision known as *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregation in public schools, it is emphatically clear that American society has a long way to go before “race” disappears as a concept or as a factor that affects peoples’ lives. And in recent years, a number of authors—scholarly and not so scholarly—have continued to publish works that argue for the significance of inherent “racial” differences.³

Much of this came into sharper perspective when in late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. The mayor, anticipating disaster, ordered a full evacuation of the city, and many fled in massive lines of traffic. Many others—the poorest of the population—had no means of leaving and no place else to go. Water breached some of the levees, and 80 percent of the city flooded. The deepest water inundated the poorest sections, whose residents were mostly African Americans. In the aftermath, thousands of flood victims pleaded for help from the tops of their roofs, in the Superdome, and at the Convention Center, where they fled for shelter. The news media soon arrived to document their desperation; but days passed with little help from the government.

Television viewers watched in fascinated horror as mothers desperately begged for food and water for their increasingly lethargic babies. The elderly and the weak began to die. The flood waters became increasingly toxic from human and industrial waste, and in a few days, news helicopters showed bodies floating in the flooded streets. The Coast Guard lifted people from roofs and balconies one or two at a time. Yet still no food or supplies arrived for the masses in the Superdome and Convention Center. Now, television cameras showed African American victims “looting” stores, often for food and water, while news commentators described “white” victims who were doing the same thing as “finding supplies.”

Several days after the storm, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency stated on television that he was unaware of any flood

refugees in the Superdome and Convention Center. By that time victims had begun placing dead bodies at the edges of public spaces, often covering them with plastic sheets. And on CNN, a television anchor reporting on the scene observed that one could see that most of the victims were “so poor, and so black.” “Race” reemerged as a national topic.

Long after Katrina, other indicators demonstrated that the United States had “race” on its mind—though sometimes in rather astonishing ways. For the fall 2006 television season, producers of the popular “reality” show *Survivor* announced that the teams of competitors (or “tribes,” as they call them) would be organized by “race.”

As we know, “race” is not a uniquely American issue, notwithstanding the American history of chattel slavery. Most modern nations have confronted their own versions of racism. I was surprised, therefore, participating in a one-day seminar at the Australian National University in March 2003, to find that in the view of a few scholars in attendance, racism is a peculiar American hang-up and that the issue is far less contentious in Australia. Considering the extensive history of Aboriginal oppression, this was most interesting to hear.⁴ A week later, with my wife, Alice Pomponio, and our son, Gregory, I had the opportunity to spend time with two indigenous women in Queensland and hear them discuss their own experiences with discrimination in Australia. They spoke about the forced separation of their grandparents, as children, from their families. The government placed them in boarding schools, where many of them lost track of their relatives; decades later, they continued to search for their roots. The women also described the discrimination one of them had faced moving into a “white” neighborhood.

The appalling number of Aboriginal deaths in police custody continues to be a smoldering problem in Australia.⁵ But in 2003, the non-Aboriginal Australian public did not appear to feel the sort of “liberal guilt” that the history of slavery and racial oppression invokes in many Americans. Aboriginal demonstrations during the 2000 Sydney Olympics received little apparent sympathy from the Australian public, and very little attention in the media.

The point here is not to pick on Australia or even the United States in particular. For present purposes, these examples make it all too clear that problems of “race” are far from dead in many parts of the world. More insidiously, it has spread to places where it was not an issue before.

Numerous excellent books on the subject are available, but most of them focus on one or another particular aspect of the issue. We have works on the biology of human variation, but generally they devote little attention to the social, cultural, or historical aspects of racism. Others address the consequences and injustices of racism in particular societies from social and economic perspectives, but usually they pay little attention to the basics of

human biology. It seemed that it would be useful to have a book that brought these various aspects of the issue together in one place.

If “race” is a concept without biological validity, then we need to explore human evolution and population genetics in order to understand *why* it lacks a scientific basis. If the idea of “race” is a cultural phenomenon, we need to examine the cultural contexts in which this idea has become a part of folk belief. But we also need to examine a range of other cultural systems in which social and cultural means of classification and distinction do *not* involve an idea of “race.” To understand why the concept of “race” exists in one context, we need to examine other contexts in which it does not. And because any cultural phenomenon has its own history, we need to examine the factors that gave rise to it. Because such a belief has social consequences, we need to examine those consequences. And finally—since many of us would agree that the concept of “race” has done far more harm than good—we need to consider whether we can ever be rid of it.

As to the pages that follow, some critics might say that this book focuses too much on the tragic side, the ugly trail of racism, without giving due account to the heroics of those who fought and sometimes lost their lives in the struggle. I accept that possibility, though I have tried to address it. But the history is not a happy one, and it is far too soon for congratulations on a battle won, notwithstanding its martyrs. Some might also relegate this book to the “blame America” category. So be it. History may not speak for itself, but it does leave traces that scholars can choose either to consider or ignore. If this were a mystery novel, the scene of the crime would be fairly obvious.

The book also gives a great deal of attention to the southern United States. Looking at racism in America, this is inevitable. The history of plantation slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the Ku Klux Klan make this impossible to avoid. This does not, however, mean that the North or any other part of the country has been exempt from such problems. In the eighteenth century, New York City had a large population of slaves, and in the middle of that century the largest and busiest slave-trading port in the colonies was Newport, Rhode Island. Recent data have shown that today, the most segregated cities in the country are in the North, not the South. I have attempted to consider and discuss the issue in an even-handed way, but the verdict is up to the reader.

Finally, I should note the limitations of the book’s coverage. It does not deal with major parts of the world, such as Asia. For readers who would like to explore that issue in East Asia, for example, some good sources are Frank Dikötter’s *Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* and *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*.⁶ I have not attempted to discuss

the vast history of colonialism in Africa or the vicious South African apartheid regime. The central focus is on the development of racism in the United States. To a great extent, however, much of racism as the modern world knows it has demonstrable origins in the English colonies of North America and the early United States.

Before going further, I want to express my thanks to Dr. Leni Pederson of Western Washington University, who gave me some detailed and excellent feedback on early ideas for this project, and to Carol Budd, a wonderful biologist who saved me from some errors in Chapter 2. I would also like to express my gratitude to an anonymous reviewer of the manuscript, who set me straight on numerous issues. I am indebted, as always, to Professor Alice Pomponio, my wife, department chair, and constantly supportive colleague, whose willingness to read through an earlier draft of this manuscript was an extreme act of love and self-sacrifice.

Finally, I would also like to thank some people who have never seen this manuscript—many of them probably never will—whose insights and companionship have contributed to it indirectly. Thanks to Pakuo Lesorogol and Mama Lalasi for their hospitality some years ago in Samburu District, Kenya, and to David Kitawi and Christopher Fumbu in Mterwa, Taita District, for their kindness and friendship. Thank you to the many people on the San Carlos Apache Reservation I haven't seen for a long time, and to David Reede in San Carlos who got in touch again. Special thanks to Jeannie Herbert and Toni Peachy, respectively, Director and Chief Financial Officer of the School of Indigenous and Aboriginal Studies at James Cook University in Townsville, Queensland, Australia. Thanks to Hartmut and Sue Holzknecht, who welcomed us into their home in Canberra as if we were family—and we felt that we were. Finally, I must thank those members of the Department of Anthropology at the Australian National University who showed me that many of the ideas in this book are far from obvious, even to some professionals. I also thank those who offered helpful comments and suggestions.

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CHAPTER 1

"Race": Fact or Artifact?

Racism is real. "Race" is not. The idea that human biological differences show distinct boundaries that define and separate populations is a fallacy. The science of genetics offers no basis for such divisions and, in fact, refutes the idea that they exist. Biological research shows that although genetic differences among humans are real, any two people in the same population are likely to differ from each other genetically more than the collective genetic makeup of their population differs from that of any other population.¹

To many people, this assertion is counterintuitive. People look different. People from distant parts of the world look *very* different from one another. Racial groupings still "make sense" in popular thought, despite scientists' general acceptance of genetic findings that genes do not define "races." As one distinguished Australian colleague put it, he considered it "useful" to categorize people on the basis of skin color. Useful, indeed. We can only wonder for what purpose he found this useful. A key point, however—which we will discuss at some length in the next chapter—is that human biological differences occur in graduated, overlapping fashion. The human genome does not offer any justification for dividing humanity into genetically bounded groupings.

This fact has not been a secret. As early as 1810, the noted scholar Samuel Stanhope Smith observed that numerous writers had been unable to agree on the number of races in existence, and he concluded that the entire exercise of dividing humanity into such bounded categories was senseless.² More than half a century ago the anthropologist Ashley Montagu made the same argument, without the benefit of more recent genetic findings that substantiate his points.³ For centuries, some scholars have observed that the visible features of human beings differ gradually, blending into one another. Modern genetics has not only substantiated this impression emphatically, but it has demonstrated even greater biological unity throughout the human species than visible characteristics might suggest. All humans share genes at the rate of 99.9 percent.⁴

The nineteenth-century concept of “averaging” visible characteristics within broad populations reinforced the perception of racial difference. Determining the average nose form, head shape, or any other characteristic served to wash out the extensive range of variation that exists within any population. The average characteristics of any such large, often arbitrarily defined, groupings helped to emphasize contrasts between “typical” forms, overlooking the gradations and varieties within them. It might be possible to determine the “typical” Sumatran through a statistical analysis of measurements—but one would be hard-pressed to find any walking, talking example of this typical individual in Sumatra or anywhere else. But that is only one small part of the problem.

“Race” and Racism

Nowadays, racism—the grouping of people on the basis of physical appearance for the purpose of social discrimination—is deeply rooted in many societies, particularly in Western Europe and North America. Historically, however, racism is a recent phenomenon, especially with respect to the assumption of genetic boundaries. Well before Mendelian genetics offered a scientific framework for speculation on human population differences, debates about separate divine creations held the field.⁵ But even these debates did not become a significant part of intellectual discourse until the nineteenth century.

Although racism rests on an erroneous premise—the assumption that biological “race” is real—racism has a reality that “race” does not. As a cultural pattern, racism is real enough to produce dire social consequences. It is real enough to affect what happens to living people on the ground, in specific places, in real time. Yet despite its concrete effects, racism is a cultural artifact, the product of a particular cultural context—a part of a belief system. And as an aspect of belief, racism arises from distinct historic events and social and cultural dynamics. Being a learned cultural phenomenon, it is an acquired characteristic.

People in various times and places have held myriad concepts about the nature of humanity. The history of ideas in Euro-American thinking demonstrates that the earliest references to a concept of “race” in European literature do not appear with much frequency until the 1500s, and such references become common only in the eighteenth century, just a few generations ago. Racism, having its own specific and limited history, is far from universal or inevitable, as we shall see in later chapters. From the perspective of the broad scale of human experience, it seems to be unique in many respects.

This is not to imply that most peoples throughout time have not drawn distinctions between themselves and others. Nor, as far as we know, is it

unusual in the history of humanity for distinctions of this sort to involve negative assertions about others, whether they be outsiders who live beyond some perceived social boundaries or despised categories of people within one's own social order. Questions arising from this propensity to make distinctions lead in many directions. What, for example, is the range of criteria that people in different times and places have invoked to express ideas of separateness?

Let us draw back a bit and think about this. No two individuals, even identical twins, are truly identical in every way. In that sense, we can agree that human difference is not only profound, but absolute. But human distinctions usually focus collectively on *groups* or *categories* of people. Since the reality of human variation offers almost unlimited possibilities for making distinctions, it is clear that ideas about differences among groups generally focus on some criteria, but ignore others.

How do these distinctions arise in the first place? Ultimately, how it all started may be a question without any possible answer. Generally, people do not create social patterns and practices intentionally. Peoples' perceptions of categories usually are matters of received wisdom. People are not merely born, in the sense of entering daylight for the first time from a warm, dark place, but find themselves in the midst of particular social and cultural contexts, in specific times and communities. They undergo a process of socialization that if successful, adapts them to their social setting and shapes their perceptions of themselves with respect to others. They encounter preexisting circumstances—circumstances they might eventually help to alter, but did not create in the first place.

Cultural Dynamics

Socialization does not mean that culture produces absolute conformity. As we know, a common part of the human experience is that people often want to change some aspects of their situations, and sometimes they even succeed in doing so. But usually, peoples' concepts of what is possible or desirable arise from the cultural settings in which they find themselves. These social and cultural realities tend to act as constraints on radical change. The perspectives and points of reference affecting their desires for change can, however, also arise from contradictions they perceive within their cultural and social milieus. Centuries ago, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) lamented that "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."⁶ Presumably he did not consider this a good thing. Perception of a need for change from the way things are is a frequent human experience.

This brings us back to the question of how most aspects of culture, including beliefs and perceptions, originate. That question remains so difficult

to answer that it receives little attention.⁷ We can probably all agree that culture is a product of collective human minds, but rarely have social and cultural patterns arisen as the direct result of conscious invention.

One might object that many distinct features of culture have, in fact, been intentional changes. A new type of hoe, a better weapon, or a new song is clearly the result of some purposeful innovation. But we need to look beyond the creation or production of such novelties and to consider the cultural and social dynamics that give rise to a perceived need for them. We also need to examine the reasons for their adoption or rejection and, perhaps even more important, to explore their unintended repercussions. We need to consider not only the extent to which they become a part of the cultural inventory, but also how they affect culture or society by their presence. The unforeseen consequences of such innovations can be significant. If the innovation becomes established rather than forgotten or discarded, it may have far-reaching, unintended repercussions.

The automobile certainly was a purposeful invention. But the consequent transformation of American society through the impact of assembly-line manufacturing, changes in labor patterns and practices, the construction of interstate highways with their economic effects on local communities, and the international politics arising from the need for oil in the Middle East were all epiphenomena that arose from the initial innovation. Such epiphenomena would have been difficult to foresee, let alone to contrive.

Even if the idea of "race" had been an invention of some anonymous individual in the past, its subsequent consequences took on dynamics of their own. The origins of the idea might seem irrelevant. On the other hand, all such innovations occur within a cultural context. The automobile, the improved hoe, or the sharper spear point arose because they had some perceived value within a particular cultural setting. So, too, did the innovation of "race." If we hope to understand the nature of racism, we need to explore its origins in the social, economic, and cultural context in which it appeared.

Pondering Differences

Accounting for what people are like and how they got that way has been one of human beings' favorite pastimes, probably ever since speculation became one of our capabilities. Some peoples have held the belief that in a misty dreamtime, humans, animals, the landscape, and everything else were created as they are today—a view that lends a sacred aura to the status quo. Many Australian Aboriginal peoples hold such a view.⁸ So do many present-day Americans, according to recent opinion polls.⁹ Other peoples, such as the Navajo, taught their children about adventures and tribulations long

ago when their ancestors ascended from underground to the earth's surface, level by level, acquiring their nature, characteristics, and proper roles along the way.¹⁰ By implication, other groups, without the benefit of such an odyssey, never quite learned how to behave properly. Some hunting peoples conceived of a time when animals were like humans and were able to talk with us as equals. Still others, on the contrary, asserted that humans once were like animals until we became as we are. Some groups have maintained that we once were godlike beings with superior powers and qualities, but since those halcyon days things have gone downhill. No doubt this urge to explain ourselves stems from a reflective puzzlement and a curiosity about how things came to be the way they are. Often, too, these tales, myths, axioms, hypotheses, and truisms serve to affirm why things *should*, or perhaps *must*, be the way they are.

Explanatory philosophies of this sort not only center on general human characteristics and behavior. They also attempt to cope with an awareness of others who are different in some way from the observer's own cluster of acquaintances. Most of us, it seems, can accept that the way *we* behave is rational, natural, and "human," whether underwritten by the gods or achieved through tribulations, even if our behavior at times falls somewhat short of perfection. But what about those *others*?

With the possible exception of the Polar Inuit, who into the nineteenth century, according to legend, believed that they were the only people on earth,¹¹ one essential aspect of the human experience has always been the intriguing knowledge that there are others over the ridge, beyond the lake, on another island, or across town who are different. The issue of why *we* are the way we are involves the related issue of why those other people are so unpredictable, look so bizarre, talk so strangely, sing such irritating songs, and eat that disgusting food.

Complacency about the soundness of one's own ways, whether on the basis of rational, natural, or supernaturally sanctioned superiority, seems to be a ubiquitous human tendency. To be sure, some individuals might be afflicted by all sorts of deprivation and social traumas to the detriment of their self-esteem.¹² But rare is the group who collectively see themselves as less worthy, less rational, or less sensible than others—even though in some sociopolitical situations, the conviction of superiority may be covert (for strategic reasons). Even political or economic domination, with its attendant disparity of wealth and power, does not necessarily obliterate this conviction.

Just How Different Are They?

Ethnocentrism does not always entail hostility toward other populations with "exotic" modes of living. When it comes to different customs, humans

seem to be as capable of patronizing tolerance as we are of xenophobia, disdain, or animosity. Expressions of admiration for isolated aspects of other peoples' behavior—whether it happens to be their talent for making wooden bowls, their virtuosity in the skills of sorcery, or the way they teach their children to behave respectfully toward their elders—may be just as common in the human experience as shocked disgust at the way they touch food with their left hands or clucking disapproval of the way they allow women to talk freely with their husbands' male relatives.

People have accounted for differences in human temperament, accomplishments, preferences, and propensities by attributing them to the blandness of their food or the spiciness of their cuisine, the bracing coolness of their climate, the altitude of their mountainous regions, the experience of being surrounded by hostile neighbors, the manner of raising their children, and countless other causes.

Explanations of this sort rest on experiential factors. They involve a sense that at a basic level, what amounts to a commonly shared raw human material has been molded in a variety of possible ways, albeit with curious and perhaps even grotesque results. But despite the widespread propensity of humans to refer to themselves by some term meaning "the people," most groups of *Homo sapiens* do recognize other members of their own species when they encounter them, no matter how eccentric the others' behavior might seem. Far more rarely in human history have groups of people accounted for contrasts between themselves and others by assuming differences in their intrinsic nature. Within this category, we can include one of the most peculiar and culture-specific explanations of all: the notion that people behave the way they do because of inherent biological characteristics. The idea that there are fixed differences among human populations departs in a fundamental way from the idea that these apparent differences result from experience.

If factors that account for human differences are dietary, climatic, educational, a result of environmental opportunity, a consequence of political history, or the product of some other external causes, the implication is that these factors have worked to influence, and even to mold, a basic human material that nonetheless is essentially uniform at a fundamental level. Biological explanation of "racial" difference, in its strongest form, denies the commonality of this basic human substance.

The dichotomy between these concepts is not always clear. We need only recall the imaginative Lord Monboddoo of the late eighteenth century, who suggested that the body form of orangutans is the result of inadequate education. With proper tutelage, he argued, these deprived apes would undergo a transformation in physique as well as in intellect.¹³ A few later social thinkers anticipated that a good exposure to civilization could bring about a

lightening of skin pigmentation.¹⁴ But even though these rather curious ideas incorporate both biological and environmental factors, they actually represent extreme versions of environmental explanation. They relegate biological traits to the role of symptom, rather than cause.

The Use and Misuse of Biology

Biological explanation could come into play only with the emergence of biology as a conceptual framework. Biological determinism—the idea that biology determines all or most human characteristics, including behavior—represents an extreme case of a more general belief in inherent, fixed differences. As biological insights and concepts developed over the past several centuries, biological explanations of human behavior reflected these changes.

The development of biology as a science was an important aspect of a more general development of science itself, not only as an intellectual enterprise but as a cultural *style*. As such, biology has shared many of the connotations, both positive and negative, that have accrued to science itself in popular attitudes. As biology advanced over the decades, some of the older, cruder aspects of early biological determinism have fallen into disrepute, but they have not disappeared entirely. Often they persist in the trappings of revised terminology. In 2006, a science writer for *the New York Times* wrote a book arguing that since the human genome has continued to evolve over the past ten thousand years, human culture has also changed.¹⁵

No one, presumably, would dispute the observation that culture has changed immensely over that length of time. That period encompasses, after all, the invention of agriculture and the appearance of the first cities. Yet the willingness, perhaps even eagerness, to attribute these changes to genetic mutations rather than human learning and cumulative experience has remained a consistent theme for proponents of biological determinism.

Science has always provoked a good deal of ambivalence, even as we applaud and benefit from its accomplishments. Profound distrust has often tempered the prestigious image of heroic optimism associated with the promise of discovery. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's nineteenth-century novel *Frankenstein* expresses this ambivalence. More recently, the cloning of animals, and possibly of humans, has generated deep misgivings among many.

By the mid-nineteenth century, biology also came to share an image with the rest of science as being increasingly inaccessible to the untrained "average" person, particularly as it moved from the parlors of curious men of leisure, pursuing their interests as amateurs, to research universities that required the credentials of advanced degrees. Early biological pursuits often rested on the intellectual curiosity of a gentlemanly elite who enjoyed enough discretionary

time to ponder nature's marvels. This inquisitive elite also had sufficient personal resources to build private, often celebrated, collections. But biology changed character as it diverged from taxonomic studies and “natural history” and came to embrace rigorous research in laboratories, controlled experiments, and peer-reviewed publications. Serious scientific biology was no longer merely a pastime of wealthy dilettantes. One consequence of this divergence was to lend “scientific findings” some exemption from social criticism. For the most part, average folks were unable to replicate its methods, and increasingly, they were unlikely to challenge the conclusions of professionals.

On the subject of human beings, one essence of biology as a style of thought rests on a concern with human physical characteristics in the context of a broader faunal milieu. This concern has had two important implications. First, despite the interest in human evolution since the nineteenth century, when it came to dealing with living populations, the early biological framework underscored our animal nature but focused its concerns on aspects of humanity that seemed relatively fixed, at least in the short term. To the extent that biological traits are an inherent part of one's physical being, they are not capable of much change during one's lifetime, aside from the natural processes of growth and aging. Even for those who accepted the idea of evolution, it was clear that such traits might change only after many generations, if at all—a period of time so long as to render the likelihood of change almost irrelevant to anyone personally concerned with it. In pre-Darwinian days, assumptions about the fixity of species, based on divine creation, precluded even the prospect that slow natural selection had caused or could bring about significant alterations in biological characteristics.

Second, the establishment of biology as an explanatory framework came to be associated with the Enlightenment notion that reality is subject to laws that humans can discover and, given enough knowledge, even hope to understand.¹⁶ By the late eighteenth century, this bouquet of concepts had come to dominate scholarly thinking in Europe and the United States. Intellectuals placed great expectations on the ideal of a secular, rational, and dispassionate mode of inquiry that would be capable of dealing with difficult questions about the natural world and the place of human beings within it.

The Implications of Biological Explanation

In the current century it seems unreasonable to deny that we human beings are just one form of the many representatives of the “animal kingdom,” a part of nature, even though a considerable constituency in the United States continues to believe that we are products of divine creation. As we shall discuss in Chapter 2, human evolution is still very much subject to debate

in some circles, many generations after the publication of Darwin's *Descent of Man*.¹⁷ Human origins aside, however, it is evident that we share with other species the need to cope with the basic biological problems of hunger, death, sexual reproduction, physical disease, and a range of other consequences of being flesh-and-blood entities in a material world.

The rich array of means by which humans in various places and times have come to grips with such matters is fascinating in itself. The ethnographic literature offers a cornucopia of examples of culture confronting and interacting with nature. Surveying these examples, we can observe various means of coping with death, for example, even to the extent of denying it through myriad concepts of continued postmortem existence. We can note the range of restrictions, elaborations, and embellishments surrounding sex and its repercussions. We can find a rich array of methods for dealing with the ailments that beset us, ranging from rituals to recapture skittish souls and draw them back into the body to the injection of extracts from molds.

But the variety does not stop there. We humans consume a gamut of foods, from termite larvae to limburger cheese, from noncaloric chemical substitutes for artificially refined sugar to mind-mellowing brews from fermented sprouted grains or crushed grapes. We handle this simple ingestion of nutrients in a variety of ways, from belly-bulging banquets to dainty diets, from functional fast-food fare to the ritual cannibalism of Holy Communion. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the ways in which we explain ourselves and account for differences among us vary at least as widely as the ways in which we meet our biological needs. In our own recent history, the biological framework has helped to fulfill this need to account for ourselves.

"Human Nature"

Writers who emphasize the biological component in human behavior sometimes argue that cultural variety amounts to superficial variation on the theme of more basic biological imperatives.¹⁸ From that perspective, such activities as amassing wealth, or giving it away in lavish displays of generosity, excelling in athletics, learning to sing well, or knowing how to tell a good story are fundamentally strategies to enhance one's chances of passing on more of one's genes than those who fall short in these abilities. Others argue that these so-called embellishments amount to most of what is interesting and significant about human beings. Despite these divergent views, there is little disagreement that humans live in a material universe and must, therefore, operate within significant biological constraints. Far more at issue, as biology has become an ingredient in European and American explanations of human behavior, has been the degree to which biological factors *determine*

what people do. To what extent does the varied behavior of humans arise from their physical characteristics? Many have applied this question to individual as well as collective phenomena.

Some social theorists would dismiss the biological aspect of humanness from explanations of behavioral difference.¹⁹ As a constant, undifferentiated factor, they argue, biology cannot take us very far in explaining most of the important things that we would like to know about cultural variety. The concept of the human mind at birth as a “blank slate” ready to receive and record the complex experiences of life is at least as old as John Locke (1632–1704), with his analogy of the “empty cabinet.”²⁰ In various forms, in fact, the idea is much older. Many writers from the seventeenth century onward have resisted the idea of innate biological characteristics. For them, “human nature” was at most a shared, basic quality. Differentiation grew through varied experiences and acquired knowledge.

Early in the twentieth century the French social scientist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) adamantly maintained that only social causation can explain social phenomena.²¹ He envisioned a progressively inclusive hierarchy of complexity among levels of reality. The principles of chemistry, for example, incorporate principles of physics but also go beyond them. Biology rests on principles of chemistry, but chemistry by itself is not sufficient to account for biological phenomena, which operate according to their own rules. By extension, Durkheim argued, social phenomena incorporate physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and so on, but none of these is sufficient to explain society. Social phenomena, as a distinct order of existence, operate according to their own principles.

Structuralism versus Biological Determinism

Taking a different tack from a similar starting position, other theorists—particularly structuralists—have worked with the premise that some fundamental underlying human traits do indeed relate in interesting and important ways to the variable manner in which people behave; but in this case, the direction of inquiry is reversed. “Surface” phenomena—speech, mythology, or marriage rules, for example—offer means of gleaning clues to subconscious, and presumably panhuman, mental structures that have operated beneath the surface in various but finite ways to produce the diversity of human performance.

This is rather different from biological determinism, since it posits a common substratum from which diversity arises, rather than substrata that are diverse to begin with. Structuralist approaches in their various forms, exemplified prominently in the work of people such as Noam Chomsky²²

and Claude Levi-Strauss,²³ assume that all humans share a common mental structure. Being universal, structure is a part of the general human biological heritage; thus, in itself, it cannot account for differences. The structure is a basic foundation upon which experience generates diversity—within limits. Chomsky, for example, has worked with the principle that all languages share certain underlying characteristics because of a universal human generative structure that operates at a subconscious level. Beyond the human propensity to speak some language—*any* language—all of the thousands of actual human languages have developed on the basis of this structure and continue to operate according to its rules. Biology does not determine the thousands of mutually unintelligible languages of humankind. It makes them possible.

Biology does constrain language possibilities. But it has also made humans capable of language in the first place, even making language necessary for human existence. But although this universal substratum is the framework for linguistic diversity, nowhere does this model suggest any direct biological causes for the diverse forms that languages have developed. Speaking Chinese rather than Hopi or Swahili is a matter of experience, not biology. This approach does not involve any suggestion that inherent biological factors make *particular* humans more likely to speak or develop one language rather than another. On the other hand, some biological determinists *have* made such an argument.²⁴ Some structuralists would argue that underlying structures apply to other aspects of culture as well.²⁵ From this perspective, the vast diversity of human cultural phenomena rests on a fundamental sameness.

There is little disagreement that humans in various populations behave differently. The crux of the debate is the extent to which these differences are due to biology rather than culture. At one end of the spectrum, if biological influence on human behavior is very slight, then it can account only for the obvious general characteristics all humans share, many of which we share with other species as well. In this view, the ways in which we *differ* behaviorally arise from cultural factors. At the other end, if biological influences on human behavior are very strong, obvious differences in behavior are more likely to have a biological basis. The greater the influence of biology on behavior in general, the greater the biological causes for the ways in which behavior differs. The further end of this continuum, the domain of biological determinism, is also the domain of racism.

What Do Twins and IQ Have to Do with Race?

Ultimately, it would seem, the extent of biological influence on human behavior is an empirical question. The answer should depend on what the *facts* are. But the issue is not that simple. To separate the inherent biological

aspects of human behavior from those acquired through experience and social learning is probably impossible. No human being, as far as we know, has ever survived infancy entirely free from the influence of other human beings. Stories of feral children raised by wolves or other animals are fairly common and certainly intriguing; but none of these cases has ever been substantiated. Even if any of them were true, it would be difficult to eliminate the likelihood of some early human interaction before the feral fosterage came about. For the most part, though, such individuals have turned out to be neglected, and often mentally disturbed or disabled, children.²⁶ Far more common, and decidedly better documented, are cases in which children have died as a result of physical neglect and inadequate social support. Infants need the nurturance of other humans—physical and social—to survive.

As an alternative approach to the question, numerous studies have focused on genetically identical twins separated at birth. In these studies, researchers are hoping to tease out any characteristics that the twins might share by virtue of their common genetic heritage. Such situations are rare enough to cause problems in acquiring a sample sufficiently large to be statistically meaningful, and it is still rarer to find identical twins who have been raised in entirely different cultural settings, rather than in different families within the same society. Popular belief, though, has long held that a special sympathetic relationship exists between such pairs (and we also have the Corsican brothers, those feisty identical siblings of nineteenth-century literature, as a fictional example).²⁷

In the 1970s this line of inquiry suffered a major setback when it became apparent that a leading researcher in the field, Sir Cyril Burt, had tampered with the data to support his deeply held conviction that intelligence is predominantly inherited. Sir Cyril's game-playing with the numbers turned out to be a little too enthusiastic. The scores he recorded for intelligence tests taken by twins were virtually as identical as the siblings themselves. The results were far closer, in fact, than one might expect if the same person had taken the test at different times.²⁸

But studies of twins have continued, and the issue remains unsettled. One indication of the popular interest in such matters appeared in the media in 1987.²⁹ The article described twin brothers in Ohio who had been separated at the age of four weeks and reunited some forty years later. Allegedly, they were astonished to find the extent to which their lives had run parallel courses. And no wonder. No test scores here. Among other things, each drove the same model of blue Chevrolet, chain-smoked Salem cigarettes, and had a dog named Toy. Such a result would have been far beyond Sir Cyril's wildest dreams, one would think. A genetic propensity to name one's dog "Toy" would indeed be a significant discovery.

The scandal surrounding Sir Cyril's twins studies touches upon another aspect of the issue. Historically, debates over the degree of biological influence on human behavior and capabilities have rarely been dispassionate. More typically, they have been electric with angry sparks (not to mention the smoke-and-mirrors effects of Sir Cyril's sullied scores). Deep convictions have motivated protagonists on both sides. Those who have donned the mantle of science, no less than those who have argued on other grounds such as morality, have been very much aware that a great deal is at stake.

Ultimately the issue is not only what people are like, but what they *can* be like. The issue is whether the violence, social inequality, and economic exploitation that many people deplore are inevitable manifestations of a built-in "human nature," or whether we can eradicate these things through changes in the conditions or environments that might have engendered them in the first place. The issue is whether those who enjoy special privilege or power do so because they are intrinsically more "fit," or because of other factors. The issue is whether performance on intelligence tests or success in school is genetically predestined, or strongly affected by social conditions. We will examine these questions more closely in the Chapter 2.

How frustrating, then, that the hard, empirical "scientific data" that could settle this once and for all are not available. But there it is. The natural habitat of the human animal is, and always has been, in the midst of other human beings. We are nothing if not gregarious. It is not just that we generally like to be within reach of other human beings, however grumpy or asocial we might be. We need to. Even the occasional hermit we hear about has had at least some contact with others. Generally, social isolation is either a deprivation—an exercise in religious asceticism, perhaps—or the manifestation of some mental disorder, or both. Most would agree that short of death or torture, solitary confinement is among the severest punishments of all. One of the more dreaded penalties that ship captains, mutineers, and other rough-hewn characters in the past could inflict was to maroon someone as a castaway on a deserted island (in lieu of an island with hostile inhabitants). Remember pathetic old Ben Gunn in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, dementedly begging for a piece of English cheddar?³⁰ And how about the tribulations of that dean of castaways, Robinson Crusoe,³¹ until he teamed up with Friday?

Even such partial isolation is unusual in human experience, especially in the early years of life. Well before birth we are bombarded with stimuli of all sorts, not to mention the effects of nutrition on our development. The first experience we have upon emergence into the open air depends on when, where, and to whom we happen to be born. We might be bundled up in animal hides or a polyester blanket, bathed in cold or warm water,

rubbed down with a rabbit pelt or pig fat, cooed to by a maternal voice or given a welcoming speech by an old man, sprinkled with corn pollen or swatted on the buttocks while being dangled upside down by the ankles. Whatever one is to make of these impressions, each is just the beginning of an endless series of experiences that continue to the end of life.

How, then, can we separate the biological aspects of what humans are all about from those features of being human that result from what one has learned and experienced? These are inseparable aspects of humanness itself. We have no clear example of "purely biological" behavior beyond the most fundamental examples we share with other species—and without going into unnecessary detail, even these are riddled with all sorts of learned stipulations and procedures. And so the debate continues, even in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Many of those who argue for strong biological influences on human behavior have been accused of being apologists for the status quo—of being "conservative," at the very least. Whatever their political sympathies may be, one implication of arguing for the relative fixity of behavior is indeed conservatism of a sort because it means that things are unlikely to change much from the way they already are. Some of those who hold such a position have argued explicitly that attempts to bring about change are doomed to failure if these changes run counter to the underlying genetic imperatives that govern human action. These purported imperatives have included the need to express territoriality,³² to vent aggression,³³ and to maintain a dominance/submission relationship between males and females.³⁴

Social Opinion in Scientific Clothing

In the past century or so, debates on this issue have usually summoned the authority of science. And sometimes, individuals at the center of these debates have achieved distinguished personal credentials as scientists, including, in some cases, the Nobel Prize.³⁵ Generally, however, the scientific accomplishments of such acclaimed figures have not been associated with research directly involving human beings. Nonetheless, what they have had to say about human behavior has enjoyed an aura of heightened credibility through association with their scientific triumphs, or at least scientific respectability, in other areas of research. On the other hand, many of their arguments would appear to represent an unusual kind of "science," since the concrete evidence that might establish a strong biological component in human behavior is not available.

Science usually proceeds on the basis of hypotheses that can be tested against empirical evidence. Creative thinking, logical exercises, or daydreaming

may well contribute to scientific inspiration, but only a sound empirical basis can distinguish scientific conclusions from speculation, fantasy, or fabrication.

Not everything a scientist does is science. When a Nobel laureate tells his daughter to be home by eleven, he is being a father. When he cheers for the Mets, he is being a fan. When he stir-fries a concoction in his wok, he is (one hopes and assumes) being a gourmet cook. When he argues without the backing of empirical evidence that aspects of human behavior have a biological basis, he is expressing a social opinion that we need take no more seriously than his daughter takes his edicts or we take his opinions about baseball. Such viewpoints are expressions of social philosophy and no more, even though they may be the opinions of people who happen to be noted scientists rather than bank tellers, housepainters, or acrobats.

In the nineteenth century, many versions of biological explanation were blatantly racist. We will discuss these more fully in subsequent chapters, but suffice it to say here that social philosophy in the guise of science has a long tradition of that sort. In retrospect, those early works offered very little that was scientific beyond their posture. But they found favor in the sociocultural milieu of their times, and it is worth considering the public reception that many of these works enjoyed. Why were these ideas so appealing, so congenial to popular thought? Most modern theorists would disavow any racist implications in their work, but racists might find much of interest in the conclusions that these theorists often draw from scanty evidence. Why do such arguments continue to enjoy such widespread interest, media attention, and often, ready acceptance?

Probably, we can find no simple answer to this, but it does seem to be the case that arguments for inherent differences among categories of people are particularly well received in social systems in which access to status, power, and wealth is unequal.³⁶ And, of course, the receptive consumers of such intellectual propositions tend to be those at the upper end of the scale rather than those at the bottom. The self-justifying aspects of these views indicate that they often function as myths to rationalize the existing situation. In a similar vein, the Yanomamö of tropical South America employ a myth to explain the difference in "fierceness" between men and women in order to rationalize sexual inequality.³⁷ It asserts that the sexes were created separately, with the moon's blood falling on men, giving them a nature that compels them to domineer in relations between the sexes. Some writers in the United States have argued that "male dominance" is genetically programmed in humans. Similarly, the idea that the wealthy are more fit than the disadvantaged—and hence deserve their privileged position—no doubt has offered much comfort in some quarters.

It is ironic that despite their attendant aura of “science” as unassailable authority resting on abstruse complexity well beyond challenge by lay people, such explanations (or myths) tend to be appealingly simple. It might be soothing to think that human behavior is not so complex after all: just a matter of following a few basic drives. Perhaps most alluring of all is the power of biological explanation to absolve us of responsibility. Why should there be any guilt in following biological drives and conforming to the “laws of nature”? So much the better if “nature” accounts for why some of us have a lot and many have little or nothing; why large numbers of people suffer deprivation while a few wonder how to invest their surplus; why little girls are likely to earn less in their jobs than little boys when they grow up. What can *we* do about it? Is it our fault if nature can be unfair at times? For those atop the socioeconomic pyramid, the concept can be very gratifying indeed. Such ideas seem no less appealing to many in the twenty-first century than they did during the heyday of Social Darwinism in the nineteenth.

Historically, the growth of biological explanations of social phenomena in Euro-American thought coincided with the increasing economic importance of slavery and colonialism. But long after the abolition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century and the decline of colonialism in the twentieth, such explanations have continued to adapt to changing times rather than disappear. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “scientific racism” certified the inherent inferiority of Africans, Native Americans, Irish, Southern and Eastern Europeans, and many others, often ranking such groups on the basis of physical criteria—although, as we shall argue later, the use of such physical markers of identity and status were probably as much a *result* of discrimination as a *cause* of it. Nineteenth-century “scientific racism” seems out of fashion at the moment, though whether it has been put to rest altogether is doubtful. Certainly the attitudes from which it sprang remain strong in many sectors.

“Scientific racism” came to be an embarrassment by the late 1940s after the consequences of Nazi philosophy became horribly apparent. But in the following decades, scientists dealing with “race” differences soon returned to the public stage. William Shockley, who won a Nobel Prize for his work in developing the transistor, continued the claim of “black” inferiority and carried on a modern-day campaign to revive and promote eugenics, the selective breeding of humans.³⁸ Arthur Jensen at Berkeley and some of his colleagues claimed racial differences in intelligence on the basis of I.Q. tests.³⁹ In the 1990s, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein’s book *The Bell Curve* argued that African Americans on the average have less intellectual ability than “whites.”⁴⁰ *The New York Times* felt that their work merited a cover story in the Sunday magazine section.

Historical Racism

Most cultural patterns around the globe have no recorded history. We probably can never know how or when the Australian Aboriginal concept of identifying people by their birth totems originated. The idea among some Pacific Islanders that first-borns are special people, or the Hopi belief that Anglo-Americans are descendants of the *bahana*, who wandered off after their emergence from underground, are aspects of culture whose origins are probably lost forever. In the case of Euro-American racism, though, we have written records. Racism has left a paper trail.

Perhaps even more important than the origins of racism, however, are the factors that have caused it to persist, to mutate, and to spread among parts of the world far beyond its place of origin. A fundamental aspect of racism's persistence has to do with advantages that have accrued to those who embrace the idea. Among other things, racism is a state of mind that favors those on the strong end of power disparities. And, perhaps most insidiously, racism has also infected those with little power—those who strive to elevate their desperate situation above those who are still lower on the social scale.

The consequences of racism have been profound and overwhelmingly destructive in every society in which it has taken root. As many writers have pointed out, even those elites whose power rests on racial discrimination live in a social order fraught with tension despite the precarious advantages they might enjoy. In the antebellum American South, where slaves far outnumbered slave owners in many regions, the possibility of slave rebellion was a constant nightmare. In the Republic of South Africa during apartheid, where 20 percent of the population oppressed the other 80 percent, many believed that the end of racial oppression would unleash a wave of violent revenge. In many such cases, the comfort of the elite is a thin veneer covering a fear of uprising from below.

For those on the receiving end of racism, of course, the consequences are far worse and more immediate. Institutionalized racist policies and established discriminatory practices not only cause immeasurable suffering in the lives of individuals, but they instill damage that can extend collectively over generations. From the perspective of the society as a whole, such policies produce angry, marginalized constituencies with few positive stakes in the existing social order. They may pose a chronic threat to the well-being of all, including members of their own disrupted communities.⁴¹

These scenarios are most likely to develop in large state societies. The heterogeneity of state systems allows race to play a part in rationalizing or

justifying hierarchical class, caste, or interest-group differentiation. To explore this further, we will examine the dynamics of competing interest groups within states in later chapters, including ways in which elites have fostered and manipulated divisiveness among relatively powerless segments of the population.

We need not be conspiracy theorists to recognize that people often make concerted efforts to promote policies that favor themselves at the expense of others. The intentional inflammation of poor "whites" against impoverished "blacks" in the American South is one example. In South Africa, the Zulu Inkatha Party's support for the apartheid government, in opposition to the anti-apartheid African National Congress, is another. Strategies of "divide and rule," the cultivation of conflict among the disadvantaged as a means of forestalling collective rebellion, have played a major role in state systems for thousands of years.⁴²

The fallacious idea of "races" as distinct biological groups has been infectious. Like other aspects of Euro-American cultures, racism has appeared and adjusted to local conditions in many places where it was not present to begin with. Economic disparities and political oppression are probably at least as ancient as the earliest state systems in human history, but racism has offered a more recent rationale for these injustices.

It is all too common to find racism among groups who themselves have suffered it in the past. The Native American Seminoles of Oklahoma, for example, who lived in Florida early in the nineteenth century, gave refuge to many runaway African slaves. Many of these refugees adopted the Seminole language and culture and, in subsequent generations, essentially *became* Seminole. When Andrew Jackson forcibly removed the Seminoles and many other Native peoples of the Southeast to Indian Territory (later, Oklahoma), forcing them to walk the "Trail of Tears," they collectively underwent the dislocation and shared the suffering. Recently, however, a movement has arisen among some of the self-described "full blood" Seminoles to exclude "black" Seminoles from participating in the tribal political system.⁴³

This situation relates to the additional question of identity. If "races" *did* exist, what would be the criteria for assigning a person to one or another? It might be one thing if these alleged "races" were genetically isolated or even objectively definable. As we shall see, however—and as most of us already know anyway—this is not the case. Socially defined criteria for "racial" identity have always been arbitrary. In the nineteenth century, according to the "one drop of blood" principle in the United States, a person with any African ancestry at all was a "Negro," regardless of appearance.

One great-great grandparent, in other words, would be enough to nullify the ancestry of all fifteen others.

We shall explore these and other issues more fully in the following chapters. To begin, though, we will take a look at the theme that underlies the whole idea of race. In the next chapter we will consider what the study of human biology has to tell us about these matters.

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CHAPTER 2

The Biology of Human Variance

We are a species of primate, one among many. The implications of that simple fact are profound—profound enough to elicit adamant denials that it is even true. From the mid-nineteenth century, when Darwin published his *Origin of Species*,¹ to the present, when some people demand that public schools teach the biblical creation myth as an equivalent to evolutionary theory, our place among the earth's myriad biological forms has been a deeply contentious matter.

Attacks on evolution have resurged in recent years. In November 2004, the venerable *National Geographic* magazine published a special issue with the cover title “Was Darwin Wrong?”² Their answer, not surprisingly, was a resounding “No.” But the very appearance of this issue—almost a century and a half after Darwin's groundbreaking work—indicates the degree of persistent contention.

Science vs. Belief

Anthropologically, the creationist view is an interesting cultural phenomenon—an aspect of belief worthy of study in its own right. But this belief does not meet the criteria to enter the realm of science. Some creationists have attempted to invest it with a scientific aura, however, adopting the term “scientific” creationism, which often appeared in the media during the 1990s. Later still, the term “intelligent design” (ID) has come into vogue, representing an attempt to imply the involvement of some superior consciousness in the origins of natural phenomena. The magazine *Natural History* devoted a special issue to the subject in 2002.³

Proponents of ID have attempted to distance themselves from “creationism,”⁴ which is associated with a literal interpretation of Genesis. Adherents of ID, placing less emphasis on strict biblical constructionism, argue that living organisms are far too complex to have arisen “by chance,” an argument they attribute to the Darwinian model. Therefore, life must be the product of a “designer.” But that “designer,” they hasten to add, is not necessarily God. One is hard-pressed, however, to identify any other likely suspects.

School boards in several states have tried to require high school science teachers to teach that evolution is a theory "with many flaws," and that *as* a theory, it is merely one among many others. Generally, the only "other" theory in these discussions amounts to intelligent design. There is little mention of Navajo, Hindu, Kikuyu, Pitjandjara, or other versions of human origins. The issue came to a head in 2006 in Dover, Pennsylvania, when a judge ruled that to require teachers to present ID in science classes as an alternative to evolution is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Over the years, most legal scholars—and many "average" people—have understood this Clause to be a proscription against the government's advocacy of any particular religion. It seems likely, however, that the Dover ruling may be just one more battle in a newly animated ideological war.

Despite the semantic strategies that proponents of creationism and ID have employed, the blend of religious belief with scientific method makes a poor mix. Scientific hypotheses are subject to testing against empirical evidence. Religious convictions are not. Hence the term "faith." No doubt many scientists take personal comfort in their own religious beliefs; but to the extent that they "do science," they must keep these realms separate.

Proponents of creationism have argued for years that divine creation and ID constitute "theories" in the same sense that evolution is a theory. But the differences are critical. As the body of theory pertaining to evolution has developed, it has undergone generations of testing and revision on the basis of concrete, verifiable evidence. We might compare the theory of evolution with the theory of gravity. Significant questions remain about the force of gravity and how it works. Much about gravity still eludes us. Despite these uncertainties, it remains a good idea to construct bridges with guardrails and to beware of falling objects. We have not yet been able to explain fully the attraction of bodies (i.e., gravity), but empirical evidence, including countless tests and demonstrations, have not refuted the *existence* of such an attraction, whether it results in a dropped egg's splattering on the kitchen floor or the moon's orbiting around the earth. It remains a near certainty that no matter how many eggs we release above a floor, every one of them will drop, most likely with unfortunate consequences. Even such apparent anomalies as hot air balloons and airplanes have not disproved the existence of gravity, but rather have reinforced it. Moreover, science has a capacity to correct itself. Unlike gravity (and evolution), many previous scientific theories have failed to withstand accumulated evidence. We no longer, for example, believe that the human egg contains a tiny homunculus, or that firewood burns because it contains so much phlogiston.

Many questions remain about the processes of evolution. Some have to do with the rate at which evolution has occurred. Many researchers see evolution

as a gradual process in which natural selection has played a predominant and fairly continuous role. Others argue for a “punctuated equilibrium” model, which posits long periods of evolutionary stability ending in mass extinctions, presumably as a result of some catastrophic environmental change, followed by the rapid proliferation of new forms.⁵

Scientists debate alternative ways to interpret evidence, but they do not depart from empirical data. Ultimately, only empirical data can resolve these debates. Researchers on both sides of evolutionary debates study the fossil record, evidence of past climates, DNA, and scientific dating methods. No doubt some proponents of particular views harbor emotional or aesthetic preferences for their own positions over alternatives. The resolution of each question, though, if and when it occurs, will not arise from the relative strengths of the researchers’ personal commitments, but from the preponderance of evidence.

If the idea of general evolution has been subject to debate, the issue of *human* evolution has been even more heated. But before we contemplate the history of fossil discoveries and their interpretation, let us consider the nature of the scientific process in more detail.

Scientific Method

Although science rests on empirical data, the enterprise, as we know, involves far more than the simple process of discovery. Perhaps the liveliest aspect of science is what we *make* of the raw evidence. Data seldom speak for themselves. Interpretation is crucial. What do the data mean?

Two major methodological strategies have developed to address the problem of interpretation, although in practice, these strategies are matters of emphasis rather than mutually exclusive alternatives. According to one view, the best procedure is to collect as much objective evidence as possible without developing prior theoretical assumptions. The premise is that sufficient information will reveal underlying principles, regularities, or patterns that might exist. From this perspective, theory, in the form of general statements that posit correlation, cause and effect, and the like, should arise from the data. Philosophers of science usually refer to this approach as the *inductive method*. In its most extreme form, it implies that any prior assumptions are liable to distort objective assessment of the raw information, thereby inhibiting accurate understanding.

Most researchers nowadays temper this method with an alternative or, more properly, a complementary strategy; that is, they form a hypothesis and attempt to *disprove* it by testing it against the data. This strategy is what philosophers of science refer to as the *deductive method*.

The idea of trying to disprove a hypothesis may seem odd. Surely, if we favor a hypothesis, our natural inclination would be to try to *prove* it rather than *disprove* it. Logically, though, such an approach presents major problems. Suppose we hypothesize that a correlation exists between two phenomena. How could we prove it? To prove it beyond any doubt, we would need to establish that in every case in which one phenomenon is present, the other is also present. To *disprove* the hypothesis, on the other hand, we would need to find only one case in which one of the phenomena is present and the other is not. The method of attempting to disprove a hypothesis, therefore, is far more powerful.

But failing to disprove a hypothesis does not amount to proving it. Hypothesis testing gives only tentative results. If we fail to find any cases in which one of the phenomena is not associated with the other—if, in other words, we are not able to *disprove* the association—then the hypothesis can remain alive for the time being, but it always remains subject to further data. At any time, a case might turn up in which the phenomena do not occur together.

Oversimplified as this example may be, it represents an important aspect of scientific research: the answers are almost never final. Hypotheses that survive extensive failures to disprove them, however, do tend to gain general acceptance. And in many cases, they provoke further questions and generate still more hypotheses for testing. If hypotheses do fail to hold up, new questions and hypotheses are likely to arise to explain why. If the two phenomena do appear to correlate in most cases but fail to do so in a few, perhaps some intervening variable is at work.

In practice, it is clear that few, if any, researchers employ either of these methods in a pure form to the exclusion of the other. The inductive method, explicit in the work of Sir Francis Bacon in the early seventeenth century,⁶ remains a fundamental aspect of all scientific inquiry, since testable hypotheses arise from researchers' knowledge of existing data. Deduction, in that sense, would not be possible without induction.

Scientific research has progressed in this fashion, generating new questions from old ones in the face of accumulating data, sometimes uprooting established hypotheses that turn out to be invalid on the basis of new evidence. Human evolution has been every bit as subject to these dynamics as any other field of scientific inquiry.⁷

Paradigms and Revolutions

The process is far more complicated than that, of course. Some writers, following Karl Popper, have stressed the cumulative effect of scientific research

as a gradual process.⁸ Others, following Thomas Kuhn, have argued that the history of science has been far more erratic and fitful. In his influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,⁹ Kuhn points out that at any given time, certain theoretical perspectives, or *paradigms*, enjoy a general acceptance. As a consequence, many researchers who have built their careers on the basis of a particular paradigm might be reluctant to abandon it. They may even become defensive about their paradigm in the face of evidence that calls it into question. When the inadequacy of a dominant or widely accepted paradigm becomes undeniable and its rejection seems imminent, the paradigm shift is likely to be combative and dramatic—what Kuhn calls a “scientific revolution.” Such paradigm shifts have occurred many times in the study of human evolution.

The very acceptance of human evolution itself was one such revolution. Early in the nineteenth century the eminent scientist Jacques Cuvier¹⁰ advocated a model that he believed could reconcile the biblical version of creation with the increasing discoveries of the fossilized bones of extinct animals. Cuvier revised the conventional biblical view of creation by arguing that a *series* of divine creations had occurred, each followed by a major catastrophe. The last, he argued, was the worldwide flood described in Genesis.

As we know, the weight of empirical evidence ultimately discredited this view among the scientific community, although it died hard. A growing number of hominid fossils eventually made it all but impossible to deny that a series of human-like forms quite unlike modern populations had lived in the past. Whether or not any of these beings represented direct human ancestors, they did indicate gradual evolutionary change over an immense period of time and an overall continuity of development. The process of establishing this as an alternative to the previously accepted model, however, involved many personal feuds and harsh words on both sides.

Beliefs about the age of the earth also changed radically, largely through the insights of Charles Lyell.¹¹ In the seventeenth century the Chancellor of Cambridge University, John Lightfoot, had calculated that creation had occurred at 9:00 A.M. in 3928 B.C.E. A few years later James Ussher, the Archbishop of Armagh, refigured the time of creation by totaling the generations listed in the Bible; he concluded that it had occurred some time in the night before October 23 in 4004 B.C.E.¹² These calculations had tremendous implications for the issue of human diversity, among other things. If all humans were descended from Adam and Eve, how could they have changed enough to become so different in such a short time?

A major nineteenth-century participant in this discussion was the British traveler and scholar George Robins Glidden.¹³ While living in Egypt, Glidden noted that ancient Egyptian paintings, which certainly were thousands of years old, showed people with different pigmentation—including some who

clearly appeared to be sub-Saharan Africans. If Adam and Eve fled the Garden of Eden less than 6,000 years ago, the dates of these paintings left very little time for such obvious differentiation to occur. Glidden saw these early differences as evidence that different human populations had arisen as separate creations in the first place. As we shall see in a later chapter, this view attracted a devoted following in the nineteenth century.

Eventually, Charles Lyell's work challenged Ussher's calculations. Examining geological strata, and building on the eighteenth-century work of James Hutton,¹⁴ Lyell concluded that the same forces of nature that had affected the earth in the past continued to operate in the present. Deposits of lake bed sediments, erosion, and so on had occurred gradually over many thousands of years. For this to have happened, the earth would have to be far older than Ussher had suggested—old enough for evolution to have continued at an imperceptible rate over an immense period of time. Lyell's book *Principles of Geology*, in which he presented these conclusions, was a major factor in putting the geology on a firm scientific footing.¹⁵

Still another paradigm shift that caused a radical revision of assumptions about the course of human evolution occurred early in the twentieth century—again as a result of the accumulation of evidence. Among those early scholars who accepted the general concept that humans had evolved rather than having been created in modern form, many assumed that during the evolutionary process the body had remained apelike as the brain became larger and more complex. Some remains discovered in England early in the twentieth century seemed to bear this out. The *Eoanthropus* (Dawn Man) specimens consisted of a partial skull with a braincase much larger than any ape's. This skull lay near a jaw with apelike teeth, including large canines, and the bones of extinct animals.

In other parts of the world, however, fossil evidence seemed to present anomalies. In 1892 a skullcap estimated to be three quarters of a million years old turned up in Java.¹⁶ It showed a fairly small braincase and large bony ridges over the eyes. Similar ancient forms, with somewhat larger crania but large brow ridges and small canine teeth, showed up in China in 1929.¹⁷ So what was it to be? Big brain and apelike canine teeth, or small brain and human-like canines?

A decisive find occurred in 1924 when a student in southern Africa discovered the ancient skull of a juvenile with a brain about the size of a chimpanzee's. He brought it to Raymond Dart. It acquired the nickname "Taung Baby," after the site where the student found it. The Taung Baby's canine teeth suggested a closer similarity to humans than to apes. Still more striking, however, was the placement of the *foramen magnum*, the opening under the skull through which the spinal cord leaves the brain. Unlike a

chimpanzee, this individual had a spinal attachment almost directly under the skull. The creature had stood upright.

The Taung specimen represented a form we now know as *Australopithecus africanus* (Southern ape of Africa). Later finds of australopithecines confirmed that these creatures habitually stood upright. Even at this early phase of hominid evolution, more than a million years ago, these hominids had small brains but erect posture. It was clear that the body had developed some key modern characteristics long before the brain increased significantly in size.

By this time, it was *Eoanthropus* that appeared to be the anomaly. As it turned out, that specimen—which the media called “Piltdown Man” after the locality where it was found—was a fraud. Someone had taken a fairly modern human skull and placed it with a chimpanzee mandible, doctoring both of them to look as if they were contemporaneous and very old. The development of improved dating made it possible to determine the true ages of the remains.¹⁸

For many decades the culprit remained unknown, although several names surfaced over the years as prime suspects. In 1996, however, compelling evidence implicated a former curator of zoology at the Natural History Museum in London.¹⁹ By that time, sadly, the perpetrator was as extinct as the original owner of the Piltdown cranium, so his motives remain unclear. The Piltdown case offers another example of Kuhn’s point that adherents of existing paradigms may resist abandoning them, even in the face of contradictory evidence—although rarely to the extent of perpetrating a hoax on the scientific community. The more important point, perhaps, is that even in the face of such chicanery, the accumulation of evidence eventually can compel the readjustment or abandonment of even the most favored theory.

Franz Boas and the Fixity of Type

A final example from the twentieth century offers still another illustration of the disputatious nature of some interpretations of evidence. As we have already seen in the case of the fossil record of evolution, new data can engender the revision of existing assumptions, but they are also likely to provoke new controversies over alternative models. At the beginning of the twentieth century, another type of data having to do with variation and change among *living* populations provoked discussion that has resurfaced in the past few years. The issue had to do with a project that Franz Boas, who is often referred to as the founder of American anthropology, undertook in the first decade of the twentieth century.

At that time the United States was experiencing a major influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Franz Boas himself had emigrated

from Germany. As we shall discuss further in Chapter 6, many sectors of the American population, particularly those in power, were concerned that this influx of foreigners would have deleterious effects on the country and the quality of the population.

These concerns involved a mixture of ideas. Racism was one aspect, though the parameters of various "racial" categories were somewhat different from those more widely held today. In the view of some Americans, southern and eastern Europeans were not quite "white." Many also held a rather confused association of "race," character, ability, and other qualities.

It was a time when eugenics was a popular concern. Eugenicists assumed that characteristics such as intelligence were biologically inherited, and they argued that other qualities ranging from morality to a propensity for poverty also had a genetic basis. On these grounds, eugenicists sought to promote breeding among those of the "highest quality" for the benefit of society as a whole. Generally, these "of high quality" amounted to an economically privileged, lightly pigmented elite. Eugenicists also advocated the discouragement of breeding among those they considered less desirable (even to the extent of involuntary sterilization). We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 6. From the eugenicists' point of view, increased immigration of people "of the wrong sort" presented a problem.

Underlying all of this, flavored with a high degree of ethnocentrism, was an amalgam of popular ideas that tended to lump ethnicity, culture, and physical "type" as essentially "fixed" packages. In this context, Boas secured government funding to carry out a series of physical measurements on recent immigrants and their children as a means of developing an empirical basis for discussion and policy. No doubt an important motivation for him was the hope of addressing some of the groundless assertions that commonly emanated from the contemporary "scientific community." But as a strong inductivist, Boas collected a mass of data with the assumption that the evidence would generate its own conclusions.

Boas recorded a range of characteristics of new immigrants and their children, including height, age, eye color, and hair color, but some of the most interesting results came from his measurements of skull shape. The measurements involved the "cephalic index," which compares the length of the skull to its width. To the surprise of many, Boas discovered that the skulls of children born to recent immigrants to the United States differed slightly, but consistently, from the skull shapes of their parents.²⁰

The implications were staggering. It might seem obvious that the children of immigrants would learn a different language from their parents and probably abandon many customs from "the old country," from clothing styles to cuisine. But head shape? What could be more biologically determined

than the bone configuration of the skull? Obviously this could not be the result of genetic change—not in one generation. It had to be the result of environmental factors.

It is important to note that Boas was cautious about his conclusions. He never denied that genetics is the primary determinant of head shape and other aspects of the phenotype, nor did he suggest that biological inheritance in general was unimportant. The changes in head shape, as he emphasized, were small.

The width of the head expressed in per cents of the length of the head is about 78 per cent among Sicilians born in Sicily and about 83 per cent among Hebrews born in Europe. Among Sicilians born in America this number rises to more than 80 per cent, while among East European Hebrews born in America it sinks to 81.²¹

Not only were the changes small, but, as the quotation just cited emphasizes, the head forms of the parents from different parts of the world differed substantially to begin with.

But the staggering aspect of this finding was that head shapes changed *at all*. It constituted a major challenge to the assumption that physical or “racial” types display absolutely fixed physical characteristics. If something as biological as head shape could change in a different environment, surely such characteristics as temperament, ability, or moral quality were even less determined by genetic inheritance—or “race.”

In 1928 Boas took steps to ensure that his raw data, consisting of measurements from well over a thousand individuals, would be available to future researchers. Boas recognized the distinction between gathering information and the need to interpret it, and he expressed the hope that in the future, more refined methods would allow researchers to derive still more value from the data.²²

As it turned out, researchers at the beginning of the present century *did* reexamine Boas’s data and apply refined statistical techniques that had not been available to Boas. Disagreement over their conclusions provoked a controversy. Some six decades after Boas’s death and almost a century after the original research, two of the researchers—Corey Sparks and Robert Jantz—came to the conclusion that Boas had overstated the significance of his findings.²³

They cited the fact that most of the variation in the cephalic index was due to variation among the parents’ different geographic populations (or “ethnic groups,” as the authors put it). As we have noted, however, Boas also saw this as an obvious starting point.

Sparks and Jantz dismissed the significance of the change from parent to child. As they expressed it, "surely one has to argue that plasticity owing to immigration is unimportant because it has such a minor effect on intergroup variation."²⁴ Their conclusions that "Boas got it wrong" appeared in the news media, including the *New York Times*, which treated the issue with the relish one normally finds associated with a minor celebrity scandal.

Further study, however, indicates that it was Sparks and Jantz who got it wrong. A second team of researchers—Clarence Gravlee, H. Russell Bernard, and William R. Leonard—not only replicated Boas's results, but as they point out, so did Sparks and Jantz.²⁵ The point was not that the change from one generation to the next was small. Boas took pains to point out that it was. In the context of the times, the significant discovery was that any change had occurred *at all*.

The arguments of Sparks and Jantz resemble the debating tactic of overstating an opponent's position and then attacking the overstatement. They did not strengthen their case in a lengthy discourse in which they imputed biased motives to Boas. Sparks and Jantz suggested that Boas, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, held personal views that "could have influenced his interpretation of the data throughout the course of his study."²⁶ They asserted that

[I]t is obvious that he had a personal agenda in the displacement of the eugenics movement in the United States. To do this, any differences observed between the European- and U.S.-born individuals will be used to prove his point . . .²⁷

Ironically, although Sparks's and Jantz's own reworking of Boas's data replicated his findings, their core argument seemed to be their objection to the *significance* that Boas and others placed on these findings. As Gravlee, Bernard, and Leonard pointed out, however, "If Sparks and Jantz do not see the change as dramatic, then it is because Boas successfully undermined his contemporaries' blind faith in the absolute fixity of traits."²⁸

Perhaps another important issue, aside from the validity of the findings, is the public media's response to the matter. As we noted earlier, the claims that Boas "got it wrong" stimulated gleeful coverage in the media, but the conclusion that Boas "got it right after all" received little attention outside professional anthropology journals. The episode suggests that many "opinion makers" in the twenty-first century still prefer the idea that inherent, fixed differences exist among human populations. We shall have occasion to return to this point often in the rest of this book.

The Fossil Record of Human Evolution

We could say with some justification that the development of our present theory of human evolution began with the discovery of an odd-looking skull in Germany and the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, both of which occurred within the span of a few years, in 1856 and 1859. The skull, with its low cranium and heavy ridges over the eyes, did not seem to represent the face of a person one would expect to meet in polite nineteenth-century society. Speculation ensued as to whether this skull represented the earthly remains of some deformed individual, or—ethnocentrism being what it is—whether it was the skull of some Russian peasant killed during the Napoleonic wars. Eventually, however, other skulls of the same general configuration came to light. It became evident that the original skull did not represent an aberrant case, but had belonged to a fairly typical individual from an ancient population who had lived in Europe long before written history began. This population became known by the name of the Neander Valley (or *Neanderthal*, in the German of the time) where the first skull came to light.

The Neandertals (formerly spelled Neanderthals) thrived for at least 100,000 years in the late Pleistocene, first appearing at least 125,000 and perhaps as early as 200,000 years ago.²⁹ Similar and presumably related populations of Neandertals lived throughout much of the Old World. A few remnant Neandertals survived up to 30,000 years ago and perhaps even later in marginal areas, such as the western peninsula of the Asian continent that we now refer to as Europe. At least a 100,000 years before that, however, physically modern humans had already begun to spread over much of the rest of the world.

Although the original Neandertal fossil skull belonged to an ancient form of human, Neandertals appeared fairly late in the long course of hominid evolution.³⁰ We now have fossil evidence of hominids dating back several million years, the earliest of which is about forty times as old as the first known Neandertal. The interpretation of the fossil record—and the place of particular finds in the general scheme of things—has been the subject of numerous and ongoing scholarly battles, but we can now be reasonably certain of the general sequence of human evolution.³¹

Diversity among Fossil Hominid Forms

Australopithecines, whose first representative was the Taung Baby, inhabited a broad region from southern to northeastern Africa and at least as far west as Chad. They might never have been particularly numerous in a given area, but they persisted for at least two million years. It is worth considering that

australopithecines managed to exist for at least as long as the time that has passed since they disappeared.

Australopithecines show some variation in form, indicating widespread populations who became isolated from one another. At least two major types appeared during that long era, one of them a form with strong chewing muscles and a large-boned face, while the other had a smaller face. Both general types were bipedal and stood about four to four and a half feet high, with brains about the size of a chimpanzee's. The smaller-faced form seems more likely to have given rise to later hominids.³²

By at least two million years ago, some australopithecines were breaking pebbles to create sharp edges and points. This continued and intensified with the appearance of another form of hominid that researchers now include in the genus *Homo* rather than *Australopithecus*. The name *Homo habilis* (Handy Man) reflects an association with tools. *Homo habilis* lived in East Africa about two million years ago and had a slightly larger brain than the australopithecines, representing a trend of increasing brain size that would continue until it reached a peak about 100,000 years ago.

Homo habilis created stone tools with irregular shapes, many of them probably intended for smashing or jabbing, although some of these tools also occur in association with bones showing cut marks. These tools represent the "Oldowan" tool tradition, named after the Olduvai (or "Oldupai") Gorge in Tanzania,³³ which has been a rich source of early hominid fossils. In the same general era, however, a larger-brained species known as *Homo erectus* also appeared, and for the first time, apparently, hominids in the form of *Homo erectus* spread beyond sub-Saharan Africa into the Middle East, Java, southern Europe, and China.

Most *Homo erectus* brain sizes ranged from 900 to 1150 cubic centimeters—still less than the modern average of a slightly over 1300 cubic centimeters, but substantially greater than the australopithecine range of 400 to 500 cubic centimeters. *Homo erectus* was also larger in overall body size and well within the range of modern stature.

In Africa, the western Mediterranean region, and southern Europe, *Homo erectus* forms were associated with a distinctive type of tool known as the Acheulian hand axe. These tools marked a qualitative change from the Oldowan forms because they had a relatively uniform pattern and a wide distribution. They were flat, oval or teardrop-shaped implements flaked on both sides, with cutting edges. The standardization of this tool over an extensive geographic range indicates major developments in intellectual capacity, specialized motor skills, and probably more complex communication abilities. Whether *Homo erectus* was able to use fire remains uncertain. In any case, *Homo erectus* represents the first major extension of hominid

habitat beyond Africa. Distances alone indicate that local populations must have become isolated from one another and increasingly differentiated in response to various local conditions.

By at least a quarter of a million years ago, *Homo erectus* forms in most of their total range had developed still larger brains. In that general era a particularly advanced hominid, which some researchers have referred to as *Homo heidelbergensis*, had a brain size of roughly 1300 cubic centimeters, well within the range of modern populations. This form, which some researchers consider an early representative of *Homo sapiens*, appears about half a million years ago and perhaps as early as 700,000 years ago (in the original Heidelberg site and in Ethiopia).

Neandertals do not seem to have appeared until several hundreds of thousands of years later. Like earlier hominids, the Neandertals, now classed as *Homo sapiens* (*Homo sapiens neandertalensis*), had large bony ridges over the eyes and large dentition, although their canines were not appreciably larger than their other teeth. The nasal bones were large and wide, and the chins rounded. The foreheads sloped to a low, relatively long cranium, giving them a facial profile that would have projected forward more than those of most modern humans. Their skeletal remains show prominent muscle attachments, indicating powerful physiques. The average brain size of the Neandertal population was about 6 percent larger than the average for modern humans.

Unlike earlier hominids, Neandertals buried their dead in graves, often with tools or other objects that the survivors apparently valued, and in at least one case, they covered the body with flowers. Neandertal living sites in caves show a nonrandom placement of animal remains, particularly skulls, suggesting that whoever laid them out may have attached some symbolic meaning to them beyond whatever physical, utilitarian value they may have had.

Neandertals lived during conditions of glacial maximum in what is now a temperate zone. Thus, they would have needed clothing and probably artificial shelter, although they did use caves and rock shelters. They also had a distinctive tool tradition, known as the Mousterian, which shows some intricate flaking and a variety of tool forms. Neandertals clearly were capable of creating and maintaining a life whose complexity far exceeded that of earlier hominids. It would be difficult not to consider them human, although a growing consensus would consider them an evolutionary divergence from the line that led to modern human populations, rather than ancestral to modern populations.³⁴

Neandertals persisted in Europe until at least 30,000 years ago; and in Java, the Ngandong and Sambungmacan remains seem to represent a local version of Neandertal, although the dating of these remains has been subject to

controversy.³⁵ If the claimed date of 27,000 years is anywhere near correct, however, by the time of the Ngandong, modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) had inhabited other regions for tens of thousands of years.

Recent discoveries in the Indonesian archipelago on the island of Flores caused a great deal of excitement in 2005. Researchers suggested that these specimens represented a variant form of *Homo erectus*, but as adults they stood only about three feet tall. It seems likely that they would have had to use watercraft of some sort to reach that location. But the most remarkable aspect of the find was their date, which appeared to be as recent as 18,000 years ago. As it turned out, however, most researchers subsequently concluded that they were simply a local population of relatively short-statured modern humans. The single skull that appeared to show *Homo erectus* characteristics actually showed signs of pathology.³⁶

By more than 100,000 years ago—roughly in the same period as the oldest Neandertals—a hominid population with characteristics some researchers consider more modern in form, or at least, non-Neanderthal in important configurations, was already living on the southern coast of Africa near the mouth of the Klasies River.³⁷

Modern humans, as we know, have smaller dentition than Neandertals, which means that the jaws are diminished and the bony structure more delicate. The projection of the lower face to accommodate larger dentition remained a characteristic of hominids until late in the process, however; and C. Loring Brace has suggested that the late reduction in human tooth size was associated with the use of fire to cook food.³⁸

The reduced mandible, or lower jaw, of modern humans has an outward curling of the bone, producing the jutting chin that has become a hallmark of evolutionary modernity. It is ironic, perhaps, that this symbol of strength and ruggedness is actually a characteristic of a smaller, weaker jaw than our ancestors possessed. In modern populations the bony growth over the eyes is also reduced, to the extent that among females it may be nonexistent. The forehead is closer to vertical, and the cranium is rounded rather than elongated. The back of the skull is also more rounded compared with the brain-shaped occiput of the Neandertals, with their heavier, more projecting faces and larger neck muscles.³⁹

It is unclear when populations with these modern characteristics spread beyond Africa, but the recent discovery of three skulls in Ethiopia near the village of Herto offers some evidence bearing on the issue. The Ethiopian skulls, which are almost intact, are those of two adults and a child. Since they were embedded between two layers of datable volcanic ash, it was possible to establish their age with strong confidence at about 160,000 years.⁴⁰ This would make them older than the earliest known Neandertals.

The brain cases are not only large but rounded, and the brow ridges are smaller. In effect, they seem to constitute some of the earliest evidence of modern, or nearly modern *Homo sapiens*. The location of these skulls in Ethiopia, thousands of miles from the 100,000 year-old modern forms on the southern coast of Africa at the Klasies River, pushes back the likely time of the spread of modern non-Neandertal humans out of Africa to a much earlier migration.

These finds also brought about a re-examination of earlier discoveries in the region. In 1967, Richard Leakey and his team had discovered human fossils that they took to be about 130,000 years old near the Omo River in Ethiopia. Since the researchers were looking for early australopithecines, the remains received little attention. Improved dating, however, now indicates that the Omo remains may in fact be more than 190,000 years old. The fossils, including skull fragments, represent two individuals, one of whom, according to researchers, appears to have modern characteristics.⁴¹

Neandertals and Modern Populations

As modern humans spread beyond Africa—no doubt with many setbacks—we know that other hominids already had long occupied the Old World. Since Neandertals were still present in parts of Europe at least as recently as 30,000 years ago, we cannot doubt that multiple forms of hominids shared the earth over a considerable length of time, though whether these populations differed enough to constitute different species is hotly debatable. The conventional understanding of species involves the inability of members of different species to mate and produce viable, fertile offspring. It is difficult to see how one could apply such a test to fossil forms.

Yet by 20,000 years ago or so, modern *Homo sapiens sapiens* was the only hominid species still existing on the planet. The majority of researchers agree that no living humans are descendants of any other form of hominid, and that all of the other forms had become extinct.

It is not at all clear what brought these extinctions about or how they happened. The older idea that Neandertals simply evolved into modern humans is no longer tenable, since modern humans coexisted with Neandertals.⁴² DNA tests have affirmed the genetic distance between the two forms.⁴³ Certainly both of them were offshoots of an earlier hominid base population and shared the same ancestors.

Since they coexisted for thousands of years, an obvious question is why that coexistence came to an end. Some theorists have seen the replacement of Neandertals by modern forms as a result of violent conflict resulting in the “survival of the fittest,” the extinction of the more primitive by the more

advanced. This idea had great resonance in the nineteenth century during the peak of European colonial expansion, when it offered a mythical justification, a "just so" fable, that resonated well with contemporary politics.

There is no doubt that human history, and prehistory, has involved a great deal of violence. On the other hand, some Neandertal sites, most famously at Mt. Carmel in the Middle East, suggest evidence of cohabitation between modern forms and Neandertals, although poor excavation of the site by untrained workers makes almost any interpretation questionable. As we know, sex is an important aspect of human interaction. Some researchers have argued that Neandertals and *Homo sapiens sapiens* populations finally interbred and merged.⁴⁴ According to one version of this model, modern humans, who were more numerous, genetically swamped and absorbed the relatively small population of Neandertals, which would mean that Neandertals did contribute something to the modern gene pool even though that contribution may have been minor.

Recent DNA research has shed more light on this issue, although it has not resolved it entirely. Comparison of nucleotide sequences between the original Neandertal find from Dusseldorf and modern humans shows 27 sequence differences, which the researchers interpret as indicating a separation of 465,000 years (keeping in mind that the Neandertal remains themselves are about 100,000 years old).⁴⁵ It is unclear whether this would be enough to make Neandertals a different species from *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Even though the split occurred long before the appearance of modern humans, it does not conclusively determine whether Neandertals might still have contributed genes to modern populations. It does, however, seem to dispel the idea of extensive interbreeding.

Fossil Races?

Recent findings have also diminished the plausibility of another longstanding model, which posits that modern human "races" arose from premodern human populations. In the 1960s, Carleton Coon argued that direct lines of descent had led from late *Homo erectus*, as represented by the Zoukoutien forms of China, to modern "Mongoloids." He suggested that the large-browed early *Homo sapiens* represented by the Broken Hill skull of Zambia led to what he called the "Congoid race." The rugged but modern-looking Cro-Magnon of Europe, he suggested, led to the "Caucasoid race."⁴⁶ The thrust of this argument was that an evolutionary separation among major "racial" populations occurred before the appearance of fully modern humans throughout the world. The various fossil lines had evolved separately, and some "races" had an evolutionary head start on others.

Coon's model presents numerous problems, beginning with the speciousness of the "racial" categories themselves. Africa south of the Sahara shows greater genetic diversity among its various populations than any other region on earth; yet Coon would group these populations in a single category. We will address this issue later in some detail. But as we have seen, fossil evidence that has accumulated within the past four decades has discredited the idea that different *modern* human populations evolved along separate lines in isolation from one another. Indeed, as we shall see, genetic evidence now indicates that all living humans share one ancestor who probably lived in Africa from 100,000 to 200,000 years ago.⁴⁷

Genetics

Before confronting the issue of modern human population differences, we need to consider some of the fundamental processes of evolution at the genetic level. As we know, the units of inheritance we call "genes" are combinations of four different bases strung along chains in large molecules of deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA. These molecules have the shape of long double spirals—the famed "double helix"—with each chain bound to the other by a series of base pairs somewhat analogous to the rungs of an immensely long, twisting ladder. The combinations of these bases—adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine—strung along the DNA molecules amount to genetic instructions for every living organism.⁴⁸ They determine whether an animal will turn out to be a rattlesnake or a rhinoceros or, for that matter, whether the organism will be an animal or a plant.

DNA does not necessarily transmit physical characteristics in a straightforward way. Thanks to bisexual reproduction, the "genes," or combinations of these four bases, occur in paired versions, or alleles. A single allele on a given genetic locus or section of the chromosome may (or may not) be dominant or recessive with regard to its counterpart. Moreover, dominance may be full or partial. The ABO system of blood antigens offers a common example. A person's blood type depends on which two of three possible alleles are present. A and B alleles are both dominant over O, but neither of them is dominant over the other. A person with an allele for A and one for O will have blood type A. A person with two alleles for A will also have type A.

The presence of particular alleles, as opposed to a person's actual blood type, represents the difference between the *genotype* and the *phenotype*. In this case the genotype, or genetic makeup, is either AO or AA. The phenotype for either of these combinations, or the physical expression of the genetic makeup, is type A blood. If a genotype includes a pair of differing alleles, the person is *heterozygous* for that trait. In the case of A and O heterozygosity,

the phenotype is the same as it would be if the individual were *homozygous* for A, with two alleles for the trait (AA).

If a person is heterozygous with A and B alleles at this locus, however, the phenotype will indicate the genotype unambiguously. The blood type will be AB, since neither A nor B is dominant over the other. For a person to have type O blood, she or he would have to be homozygous for O, having two O alleles. Here again, the phenotype indicates the genotype.

The human genome incorporates many other types of blood antigens. All of them depend on the presence or absence of particular alleles. We refer to this sort of trait as "genetically simple." A genetically complex trait, on the other hand, depends on the combined effects of multiple genes.

Blood antigens are useful in genetic mapping because they lend themselves to easy detection through blood samples, which makes it possible to measure the frequencies of their occurrence at the population level. As we know, however, blood types are not visible. There is no way to detect blood antigens from a person's appearance. Most visible characteristics, on the other hand, are genetically complex and depend on the interaction of numerous genes. This is true of stature, hair color, eye color, ear shape, nose shape, and so on. Some traits, moreover, reflect genetic potential that may express itself under some circumstances, but not others.

This brings in another issue. Many phenotypical characteristics that depend on the interaction of multiple genes are also subject to nongenetic factors. We know, for example, that genes affect stature and body weight, but they do not entirely *determine* these traits. Stature and weight also show the effects of nutrition, muscle use, disease, and many other nongenetic variables. Visible phenotypic characteristics, therefore, generally are products of interactions among genetic, environmental, and experiential factors. As we have seen earlier in the discussion of Boas's work, even head form is susceptible to environmental influences. We know now, many years after Boas's death, that even the neural structures of the brain change as a response to learning.

We also need to consider the issue of "heritability"—a concept that has often come up in discussions of allegedly inherited characteristics, both within and among different populations. Heritability does not refer to the simple transmission of phenotypic traits from one generation to the next, but rather refers to a comparison between the relative influences of genetic and nongenetic factors among populations. The concept of heritability does not address differences among individuals. Heritability is not, therefore, a simple reflection of genetic determinism, but of the degree to which genetic potential interacts with other factors. As C. Loring Brace puts it, "Heritability is then genotypic variance divided by phenotypic variance."⁴⁹ Heritability addresses the extent to which environmental factors interact with genetic

factors and affect the realization of genetic potential to produce observable characteristics.

One issue that has occupied a prominent place in the discussion of heritability is “intelligence.” When we consider the question of the heritability of intelligence, the issue becomes even more complex than the heritability of such a relatively simple, measurable trait as stature.

For one thing, there is no consensus regarding precisely what “intelligence” means. A simplistic reliance on standardized test scores has been a target of persistent criticism, particularly on the grounds of cultural bias. Beyond that, we have the question of the extent to which nongenetic factors such as nutrition, emotion, education, economics, and so on affect whatever one defines as intelligence. All of these factors and many others, including the circumstances in which people take the tests, vary tremendously among individuals.

Before we could determine the residual heritability of intelligence, then, we would need to gauge all of these other factors precisely. Even if it were possible to measure and record each of them accurately for a test population, it would also be necessary to assess their relative weights and importance in affecting the outcome.

Consequently, highly publicized claims that genetic influence accounts for 80 percent, or any other percent, of intelligence are based on dubious evidence, at best. If we consider the amount of information that we would need to validate such assertions, in fact, they are absurd. This has not, however, prevented specious claims, cloaked in the protective coloration of statistical tables and other trappings of “science,” that significant genetic differences in intelligence exist among different “races.”⁵⁰

Studies exploring this issue have also concluded that heritability varies depending on the statistical population under consideration. Researchers have long found significant disparities in standardized test scores between so-called “white” students and African-American students. On the other hand, more recent data indicate that investment in improved schools and enhanced home environments among African-American students result in more significant test score increases than such variables do among “white” samples.⁵¹ Is this a “racial” difference?

Not likely. In the past, most test data have come from “white” students in well-off suburban schools, in comparison with African-American students in poorer inner-city schools—a reflection of *de facto* residential segregation resulting from socioeconomic differences. In the suburban case, environmental and experiential variance among the tested students has been relatively minor. Hence the extent to which we can attribute heritability to suburban test scores was comparatively high.

In the case of African-American students, environmental and experiential factors played a far greater role in affecting test outcomes. Heritability as an explanation of difference, therefore, was relatively minor compared to a multitude of other factors. African American inner-city students, to a far greater extent than suburban students, often experienced disrupted home lives, deprivations of various sorts, and poorer schools. Hence, any genetic component affecting their scores was only one of numerous other powerful factors. In that case, heritability as a factor in their test scores was relatively low. As Rick Weiss wrote in the *New York Times*,

[I]t turned out that virtually all those studies on the heritability of IQ had been done on middle-class and wealthy families. Only when [researcher Eric] Turkheimer tested that assumption in a population of poor and mostly black children did it become clear that, in fact, the influence of genes on IQ was significantly lower in conditions of poverty, where environmental deficits overwhelm genetic potential.⁵²

One implication of this finding, clearly, is that improvement in environmental conditions is bound to have a far more significant impact on test performance for inner-city populations than it would for the suburban kids, for whom environmental conditions were far closer to being optimal.

Population Genetics

When we consider evolution, we are referring to the ways in which genetic changes have occurred in a population rather than focusing on individual genotypes. "Population" here means a collection of individuals who actually or potentially can interbreed. The genetic characteristics of a population have to do with the degree to which particular genes are present in the population's collective *gene pool*. Researchers express this as gene frequency. A certain gene might be of great importance to the individual who possesses it, but it might be extremely rare in the population as a whole. A gene with low frequency is likely to have little significance within the population's overall gene pool, except to the extent that it helps maintain variability to make future selection for it possible.

Changes in gene frequencies can occur for many reasons, but ultimately, the basis of genetic change is mutation. Mutations are errors in an individual's genetic code. These can occur at the level of DNA, or they can involve errors in chromosome replication. In either case, it is critical to keep in mind that mutations are *random*.⁵³ Since a random error in the genetic code of a functioning organism is unlikely to bring about an improvement, mutations usually are

neutral in their effects at best, and often are detrimental or even lethal. Over the long course of evolution, however, mutations have been a critical source of variability in the gene pools of populations. Genetic diversity among individuals offers the capacity for their populations to adapt through natural selection.

If the environment to which a population of animals or plants has adapted should change, genetic variation offers the possibility that some individuals in that population might have a greater ability than others to survive in these altered circumstances. If individuals possessing that trait are not only better able to survive but to produce offspring carrying the same trait who *also* survive and reproduce more successfully than those who lack the trait, the gene or genes responsible for that trait will become more common in the population. This is natural selection at its simplest.

The Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium principle shows that without mutation, selection, and other factors, the independent assortment of genes in a given population, generation after generation, would result in the stabilization of gene frequencies. Alternative alleles for the same gene would continue to exist in the same relative proportions. In actual populations, however, other factors always *do* operate. Selection, mutation, and other processes always overcome what would otherwise be a constant level of genetic variance.

We also need to consider the conditions in which most human evolution has taken place. Throughout most of human existence people have lived in small, mobile groups. Large stable communities encompassing tens of thousands of people are a recent human development and probably arose little more than 6,000 years ago. This is barely an instant in the long course of human evolution. Before the invention of agriculture about ten thousand years ago, most people lived in small bands who needed to cover large tracts of territory in their quest for food. Optimal foraging strategy theories indicate that movements of small groups of hunters and gatherers may be extensive.⁵⁴ Dené hunting groups in the North American Subarctic were known to cover thousands of square miles.⁵⁵ This does not necessarily mean that such local populations were genetically isolated in any absolute sense. Their wide-ranging mobility increases the likelihood of occasional encounters with other groups; but it does imply a relatively low frequency of interbreeding between more distant clusters of people.

Small, relatively isolated populations like this are subject to yet another factor for change in addition to mutation and selection. This amounts to what statisticians call sampling error. The total gene pool of a large interbreeding population amounts to its entire genetic repertoire, but a small sample of that overall population is not likely to have all of the genes that exist in the larger gene pool, and is even less likely to have them in the same proportions. A small group might happen to have a high frequency

of some gene that is relatively rare in the total gene pool. Conversely, they might happen to *lack* a gene that is otherwise fairly common. This is even more likely because small human groups are usually not a random sample of the population, but include many people who are close kin and who already, therefore, share many of the same genes.

If for some reason a small group like this were to become isolated—perhaps through migration to a distant area, or as a result of being prevented somehow from rejoining the larger population—their surviving offspring would start out with a genetic repertoire somewhat different from that of the larger gene pool. This is known as the “founder effect.”

Sampling error can also operate over the course of generations, even when a small population remains in the same place. Remember, not all of the total members of a group actually produce children in a given generation. Some of them are too young. Others are past childbearing age. Some of those who *are* of breeding age might be ill, injured, or otherwise unable to produce offspring. And of those who do produce children, some are likely to have far more offspring survive to adulthood—whether through selection or relatively random factors—and to have these offspring, in turn, produce more children of their own. From the perspective of evolution, producing grandchildren is even more important than simply producing children. The end result is that the actual breeding population is always much smaller than the total population itself. This disparity not only affects the frequency of genes over generations, but can also result in the loss of certain genes altogether. Researchers refer to this phenomenon as “genetic drift.”

Gene flow is another aspect of human evolutionary dynamics—a likely and perhaps almost inevitable result of migration. If a small contingent of people should leave the parent population and encounter another group, they will probably contribute their own genes, adding to the genetic variability of their hosts. All of these factors have continually affected the genetic makeup of human populations and the human species as a whole. While selection is an adaptive process, genetic drift and the founder effect have random results, although ultimately the consequences of these genetic factors are also subject to selection.

The relative randomness or selectivity of gene flow is a more complex question that need not detain us here. At this point we can set aside such questions as what might have caused local populations to intermingle, or how long they did so. Though interesting, such issues are historically specific and generally beyond the range of our information. It does seem clear, however, that given what we know of human history, it is exceedingly rare for such encounters not to have involved sexual activity, whether such interactions are friendly or hostile.

While gene flow has widened the total gene pools of populations, then, isolation has allowed differentiation through local selective pressures and genetic drift. Together, these processes have produced a species with genetic variance and regional differences in gene frequencies but a shared gene pool overall. Among the ancestors of modern humans, gene flow continually prevented differentiation from proceeding to the extent that it could create genetic boundaries, or differences at the level of species.

Clines

The distribution of genes throughout humanity shows that no living populations have differentiated enough to produce breeding isolates. Genetics does not offer any clear picture of discrete breeding populations. The distribution of genes reveals gradations in frequencies rather than boundaries, and it is apparent that gene flow has continued throughout the human species with little interruption.

This sort of distribution is referred to as “clinal.”⁵⁶ If genes occur with a high frequency in certain geographic regions, then typically they become less and less common with distance from the center of highest occurrence rather than disappearing abruptly at some genetic border. A gene may never disappear entirely, even at a great distance from the center of its highest occurrence. The same gene, moreover, can appear in more than one clinal distribution, with multiple centers of high frequency at vast distances from one another.⁵⁷

Genetically simple traits offer some of the clearest demonstrations of clinal distribution. As we noted, blood antigens are particularly useful for this purpose, since they are genetically simple and easy to detect. As it turns out, the allele for blood type B occurs with a high frequency in East Asia, where it is present in 25 percent or more of the population. In much of Europe and the Middle East, its frequency is between 10 percent and 20 percent. In Western Europe, the frequency of B is around 5 percent, and even lower in some regions.

The allele for type A shows centers of high frequency in Europe but also in some of the South Pacific Islands. The highest frequency of A, however, is among the Native American Blackfeet of Western Canada. The allele A, in other words, appears in a number of different clines. None of the A, B, or O alleles is entirely absent in any large region of the world, although they may be missing in small local populations. Many complex genetic traits such as skin color also show clinal distributions.⁵⁸

Clines can result from selective pressures that favor one trait over another in a given area. The amount of the pigment melanin in the skin, for example, tends to coincide with zones of intense solar radiation, although some

exceptions do exist. Various blood antigens may confer some advantage or other, such as differential resistance to particular diseases; but in most cases such advantages, if they do exist, are unclear. Just as commonly, perhaps, the distributions reflect gene flow more than localized adaptation.

As we can see, the mapping of a single allele such as a blood antigen demonstrates that although gene frequencies vary from one regional population to another, they do not define clear boundaries between such populations. With regard to the allele for blood type B, for example, the differences between populations of Asia, Europe, and Africa are matters of *quantity*. The allele is common in one place and rare in another. But this particular allele is only one of tens of thousands that make up the genotype of any individual. We might suspect, however, that a more complete genetic picture of different populations might make the distinctions between them clearer. What happens when we map the distribution of a large number of different genes?

As it turns out, the result is chaotic. Clines for different genes do not coincide. On the contrary, they overlap in apparently independent patterns. The B allele has a high frequency in parts of Asia, but it is extremely rare among Native Americans. The blood antigen called "Diego," on the other hand, has a high frequency both among Native Americans and in eastern Asia, but is very rare anywhere else in the world. As far as we can see, each gene has its own clinal distribution. Major exceptions to this phenomenon are certain cases in which two genes tend to occur together wherever they show up because of their adjacent loci on the DNA chain; as a result, they tend to "travel together." Taken as a whole, however, the distribution of genes among the world's populations does not support the traditional division of humanity into "racial" groupings.

The Nonexistence of "Races"

Broad "racial" distinctions have become so firmly entrenched in popular wisdom that they appear obvious to most people. One reason is that such distinctions rest on selective and somewhat arbitrary visible characteristics. But such "definitive" characteristics are not necessarily inevitable, "instinctive," or predetermined. They are subjective, and they amount to only a few of the possible features available. Skin pigmentation, hair form, and nose shape usually receive emphasis in Euro-American contexts, while other possible features such as stature, body weight, or hairiness tend to be less diagnostic in popular thought. Such traits might be a basis for judgments about people as individuals in some contexts, but they do not usually serve as "race" markers.

But dark pigmentation, closely curled hair, and broad nose shape occur in many populations that have no particular relationship with one another, aside

from their common humanity. Many Africans, South Pacific Islanders, and Australian Aboriginal people possess these features. Historically and genetically, these peoples differ as much from one another—and as little—as they do from any other human populations. Some of the greatest genetic diversity in the world, as we noted, occurs in sub-Saharan Africa, among populations that traditionally have been grouped within the same “racial” category.

What can we make of this picture? As we discussed earlier, humans in particular geographic regions have undergone differentiation through the processes of selection, genetic drift, and the founder effect. When we consider the ancient fossil record of human evolution, differentiation up to 30,000 years ago or so produced variant hominid forms that co-existed, some of which were probably different enough to constitute different species who could not mate and produce viable, fertile offspring, even if they had been inclined to do so.⁵⁹ But among the living populations of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the process of differentiation has never progressed that far.

The time involved could be a factor. Although the earliest remains of *Homo sapiens* now may date back to 160,000 years ago or more, from an evolutionary perspective, this is a very short time. In fact, the common ancestors of all living humans seem to have lived more recently than that,⁶⁰ which suggests a “bottle-neck” of some sort. According to this model, some unknown catastrophic process reduced the human population to a few thousand individuals. Modern humans, then, share ancestral roots in this small group of survivors.

If total isolation had persisted long enough among human populations, it might have been sufficient to produce genetic differentiation at the level of species; but all of the available modern genetic evidence makes it clear that gene flow has been sufficient to maintain a common gene pool among all living people.

It might be significant that human sexual activity is not seasonal, as it is among many primates, but continuous. Some researchers have suggested that the continual sexual receptivity of females in the past (and generally, the continuous interest of males in that receptivity) has been a factor in stabilizing hominid social structure. They suggest that such continuous and mutual receptivity has helped to strengthen lasting male–female bonds that enhanced the survival of relatively helpless human infants and young children during their prolonged maturation. With respect to gene flow at a broader level, this year-round sexual activity acted to prevent the genetic isolation of small breeding populations. As we have already noted, from what we know of the human experience, sex is commonly a part of group interaction even in the context of intergroup hostility.

Alan Templeton has explored the issue of genetic distance and gene flow in a study to test the possibility that deep and significant genetic differences

might exist among modern populations.⁶¹ Carleton Coon's argument in the 1960s that different "races" arose from different pre-modern hominid forms was one extreme example of such a model.⁶²

Templeton based his study on data from mitochondrial DNA. Mitochondria are structures within the cell, outside the cell nucleus. Their function is to carry on the metabolism of the cell itself. Mitochondria contain some DNA, but they have much less than the cell nucleus with its full complement of chromosomes. Mitochondrial DNA is particularly interesting and useful in this regard because in reproduction, only the mother's mitochondrial DNA passes on to the offspring. This is because the egg is a complete cell and therefore retains its mitochondria, while the sperm, which consists primarily of the cell nucleus, does not. As a result, mitochondrial DNA provides a genetic heritage passed on solely through the female line.

Mitochondrial DNA is also less susceptible to selective processes because this DNA does not affect phenotypic traits outside the cell itself. It is not, therefore, subject to natural selection' acting on the phenotype. Changes in mitochondrial DNA result from random mutation rather than selection. Based on the average rate at which these mutations occur over many hundreds of generations, it is possible to compare the number of alterations between two mitochondrial DNA samples and estimate the time of their genetic separation.

Using this principle, Templeton developed a method of comparing regional populations using what he called a "nearest neighbor" model and demonstrated a genetic continuum throughout even the most widely separated global regions. Templeton's conclusion was that levels of genetic difference among human regional populations, compared with other large-bodied mammals, are minor and "well below the usual threshold used to identify subspecies (races) in nonhuman species."⁶³

Furthermore, "all of the genetic evidence shows that there never was a split or separation of the 'races.' . . . Recent human evolution has been characterized by both range expansion . . . and a recurrent genetic interchange."⁶⁴ In other words, the alternative idea that "pure races" once existed but have been washed out in more recent times by admixture or gene flow is bogus. Genetics shows that the ancestors of modern humans have *always* been part of a single gene pool.

Bad Science

It should be clear from all of this that to categorize individuals on the basis of "race" makes little sense from a biological perspective. Even some earlier theorists who assumed that "racial" categories do have some validity have

admitted that it would be impossible to designate unequivocally the “race” of every individual.⁶⁵ One reason for this is that even visible characteristics vary among individuals within the same population.

Recent debates about “racial” categories in the United States Census have highlighted a related problem. Many critics have long recognized that the old choices of “Black,” “White,” “Native American,” and “Other” are unsatisfactory in many respects. The substitution of “ethnic group” for “race” does little to solve this conundrum. It would be hard, for example, to define the meaning of “Hispanic” as an “ethnic group” when it includes Cubans with African ancestry, Argentines with Italian and German ancestry, Mexicans with Native American ancestry, and, of course, people who actually have Spanish ancestry, among many others.

But even though these categories make little biological sense, they do reflect certain social realities. To the degree that people have been identified historically on the basis of these categories—invalid though they may be—they have often found themselves faced with social, political, and economic discrimination as a result. Social advocates who are concerned with identifying and tracking such issues have argued that maintaining these categories in official records is necessary to avoid disguising the consequences of unequal treatment.

There can be no doubt that in the United States and many other societies, people classed as “minority” groups have received differential treatment. This has also been true of categories of people who have been excluded from access to power even though they happen to be a majority. Major examples that come to mind are South Africa during apartheid, when 80 percent of the population suffered severe discrimination, and the former Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Kenya, or Uganda during the colonial era. Often such discriminatory practices rested on pseudo-scientific rationales that attributed various inferior qualities to the oppressed masses.

It has long been noted, for example, that the incidence of hypertension is much higher among African Americans than among the general population. A recent study has shown that although the frequency of hypertension in Americans of African descent is extremely high, it is moderate in the West Indies among people with essentially the same historic origins in West Africa. In West Africa itself, the frequency of hypertension is the lowest in the world.⁶⁶ What are we to make of this? Since all of these regional populations arise from the same general West African population, it is evident that environmental factors—probably including stresses associated with racial discrimination in North America as well as other factors such as diet—have contributed overwhelmingly to these differences.⁶⁷

Pseudo-science can come into play in other ways as well. A recent study of the effectiveness of drugs for the treatment of high blood pressure in the United States came to the preliminary conclusion that a certain new and expensive medication was less effective for "blacks" than it was for "whites," even though the tests focused primarily in "white" subjects. A restudy now seems to show no significant difference in responses to the medication between the two categories of subjects.

Possible differences in the responses of "blacks" and "whites" to various medical treatments have stimulated much interest in the past few years. In 2003, Howard University announced plans to compile a mass of medical information on African Americans. A venerable institution in Washington, D.C., Howard University historically has served a predominantly African American student body. The rationale for Howard's compilation of medical data was that the African American community has long been underserved and inadequately studied with regard to health issues.

It would be difficult to find fault with the quest for better and more complete information to serve the needs of this constituency, or any other, for that matter. But given the genetic diversity and clinal distribution of genetic traits within and among populations, one must ask how meaningful the distinction between "black" and "white" categories is in this context. It seems to endorse the old idea of "racial" boundaries. We might consider the possibility that the problem has been less a matter of a difference between "black" and "white" medical configurations than a matter of living conditions and differential access to medical treatment that would be beneficial to both, or of differences in life experiences arising from the imputation of "racial" differences in the first place.

Yet certain diseases do occur more commonly in some populations than they do in others. The case of the sickle cell trait is the classic example. Individuals who are homozygous for this allele suffer from the collapse of normally disk-shaped red blood cells into a crescent, or "sickle" shape. This collapse can cause clotting and the blockage of blood vessels with serious, and sometimes fatal, consequences.

This sickle cell allele occurs among sub-Saharan Africans, but it also has a significant frequency in parts of the western Mediterranean region and in southern India, in a geographic belt that does not coincide with any "racial" grouping, but with the occurrence of falciparum malaria.⁶⁸ Research has shown that people who are heterozygous, with one sickle cell allele, have an increased resistance to this form of malaria, which is often fatal.⁶⁹ The severity of selective pressures in these regions has produced a frequency of the sickle cell allele at about 20 percent, despite its deadly consequences in homozygous individuals. In the United States, where malaria does not

impose this strong selective pressure, the frequency of the sickle cell allele is closer to 10 percent among people with African ancestry. No doubt this has also resulted partly from gene flow with other populations in which the sickle cell allele is either lacking or extremely rare. Even in Africa, however, the sickle cell allele is present only in a small minority of the population.

Other pathologies occur at differential rates among socially defined sections of the populations. We can acknowledge at the outset that people with little skin pigmentation probably are more susceptible to skin cancer from exposure to solar radiation than are people with darker pigmentation. At one level this is not very different from pointing out that bald people are more likely to get sunburned scalps than those with a full mane of hair. With respect to these features, we might keep in mind that such visible features vary widely across continents and are hardly restricted to any regional population.

Although it is statistically true that such pathologies as high blood pressure, as we have seen, do vary in occurrence among socially designated “racial” groupings, that particular health problem appears to be at least partially a consequence of nongenetic factors. To put it another way, it may not be a direct consequence of West African descent, but a consequence of living as a person of African descent in the United States.

“Race-based” medicine, moreover, has a history with many horror stories. The most notorious, perhaps, is the “Tuskegee experiment,” which ran from the 1930s until the 1970s. In that “experiment,” doctors withheld treatment from hundreds of African American men suffering from syphilis—which could be cured (especially after World War II, when penicillin became generally available)—in order to observe the effects of the disease on them. With that atrocity still vivid in the minds of many, the issue of medicinal treatments that focus on “race” is understandably sensitive.

The gene pool among African Americans is extremely diverse, sharing many thousands of genes with non-African populations. From this perspective, the proposal to alter medical treatment on the basis of whether the patient appears “black” or “white” seems dubious, at best. Nonetheless, the identification of patients by “race” in medical records has persisted.

Recently a pharmaceutical company called NitroMed received federal approval for a heart medication called BiDil as a treatment especially targeted at African Americans. In tests, the drug’s success rate was higher among “self-identified” African Americans than it was in other test groups. Controversy arose over the implicit suggestion that “race” is a category with biological significance and the likelihood that factors other than “race” are involved. As a *Time* magazine article noted, “Critics point out that while the trials showed that BiDil saved lives, they failed to show whether the drug worked better in blacks than in other groups or that it worked only in

blacks.”⁷⁰ Yet apparently, the company perceived a marketing niche for a drug aimed specifically at African Americans.

That health conditions, as we have seen, are associated with environmental issues such as nutrition, life style, and the stresses associated with discrimination minimizes the significance of genetic tracking from ancestral populations. Surely no one would suggest that an increase in asthma among inner city “black” children is a result of genes rather than environmental conditions. Ironically, it seems, the concept of “race” circles in upon itself. Although “race” is not a biologically valid category, as a social category it has placed people in conditions that generate a range of disorders. When these disorders occur among them with greater frequency, their health problems come to be attributed to their “race.”

In the next chapter we can take a broader look at the human propensity to divide one another into categories. As we shall see, the criteria for doing so are rich, and diverse.

CHAPTER 3

Internal Cohesion and Social Boundaries

People in all societies have made distinctions of some sort between themselves and others, but as we have noted, the idea of “race” as a biological category is a fairly recent and distinctive European development. Later chapters will explore the history of this idea in Western thought. At this point, however, we can examine some of the various ways in which humans in other times and places have classified one another and themselves. Typically, distinctions involve identifying those who are within one’s own group—however one defines that group—and those who exist outside that range. But how *do* people define group boundaries?

To address this, we need to explore the kinds of indigenous criteria that distinguish “us” from others who are *not* “us,” and we need to consider indigenous theories about what factors account for these differences. These can include locality, language difference, cultural difference, religious difference, the purported difference between “civilized” people and “barbarians,” proprietary claims to specialized knowledge, claims of different origins or creations, or descent from a common ancestor, mythical or otherwise. We will examine cases involving each of these.

Although our main considerations are the various concepts of human difference that apply on a collective scale among groups or populations, in some cases people express group differences metaphorically in terms of distinctions that also apply within the population itself. The Hodenosaunee or “Iroquois” of the seventeenth century, for example, designated the allied Delaware as “women.”¹ Despite the pejorative implications that such a characterization might have in a European or American context, where gender-based inequality has had a long history, it had a different resonance in this Native American setting. In the matrilineal societies of the Hodenosaunee, women often had considerable authority and commanded respect. The gender-based division of roles and responsibilities among the Hodenosaunee relegated armed conflict primarily to men, but women were active in political matters

and diplomacy. In that sense, the Delaware as "women" agreed to forego taking up arms and to restrict themselves to the political and diplomatic roles as recently defeated enemies and new affiliates of the League.

In Vanuatu in the South Pacific, the people of Tanna considered those of the interior highlands to be "women" symbolically because they had special expertise in garden work and sorcery, which men and women alike considered to be female specialties.² Junior–senior contrasts in many societies also distinguished some adjacent peoples from others. Imputed relationships of that sort did not necessarily imply superiority or inferiority; in some instances, they reflected a sense of complementarity. They might also, however, imply a paternalistic "protective" relationship in the aftermath of conquest or absorption.

Early European Thinking about Human Difference

Considering the range of variation in the ethnographic and historic record in these matters, we might begin with some of the historic foundations of Western European thought as a point of departure. As we have noted, ideas of racial difference were not characteristic of earlier European thinking, and the adage that "the past is another country"—including our own past—seems especially pertinent here. If we examine classic and pre-modern ideas about human differences, the contrast with modern views is striking.

The Greek historians Herodotus, Thucydides, and Hippocrates, who lived around the fifth century B.C.E., all had considerable interest in the inhabitants of regions beyond their own city-states in the Greek peninsula and the islands in the Mediterranean. For the plucky traveler Herodotus, the strange—and in his eyes, sometimes bizarre—customs of Scythians, Persians, and others were interesting and often puzzling, but he tended to avoid judging or evaluating them. Herodotus speculated instead on possible historical and environmental causes for these differences. Rather than assuming the inherent superiority of his own people, he concluded that many foreign practices had merit in their own contexts and even considered some of them superior to his own. Herodotus was especially interested in the Persians, and he admired their valor. He was complimentary to a surprising extent, considering the wars the Persians had fought against his own Greeks. Herodotus attributed their toughness to the Persian king Cyrus's policy of settling his people in harsh lands, and he quotes Cyrus's assertion that

soft lands tend to breed soft men. It is impossible, he said, for one and the same country to produce remarkable crops and good fighting men . . . and they chose to live in a harsh land and rule it rather than to cultivate fertile plains and be others' slaves.³

Classical Greek writers debated about the nature of human existence and speculated at length about the reasons for human variety, but for the most part, they attributed these variations to almost everything *but* inherent physical differences. A perspicacious observer of the human condition, Herodotus noted differences in such physical traits as skin color, hair form, stature, and the thickness or sparseness of beard growth that distinguished the people of distant lands from the average Greek back home; but he believed that these features were malleable and due to such things as the intensity of the sun, the quality of the air, and so on. Herodotus also speculated that the origins of many customs of his own society lay with the Egyptians, for whom he expressed great admiration. Egyptians, of course, were quite different in appearance from the Greeks, including their darker complexion. Herodotus paid little attention to this, except to speculate briefly on possible Egyptian relationships with Ethiopians. As Clyde Kluckhohn put it, in Herodotus's view "men were not classified as black or white but as free or servile."⁴ There was little question in Herodotus's mind, apparently, that with sufficient time and the proper change in the environment, these exotic peoples could *become* the same as Greeks. In this regard, Herodotus represents a mode of thought that his contemporaries widely shared.

Thucydides was more interested in relationships among the various city-states within the Athenian sphere than with foreigners, reflecting on these cities' histories and varied customs and writing a detailed account of the Peloponnesian wars between Athens, Sparta, and their allies.⁵ His discussions focused on their strategies, duplicities, brave decisions, cowardly choices, and other such human issues that he felt had shaped the course of events. For the most part, however, he did not assume inherent differences in the nature of these communities—although admittedly, all of them were Greeks.

Hippocrates, symbolic mentor of today's medical profession, was also fascinated with human varieties. Often his descriptions of foreign groups were rather unflattering, but he went to some lengths to account for ethnic differences and adopted a dispassionate stance in analyzing the causes of other peoples' characteristics. In keeping with his medical bent, he was prone to discuss these differences as if they were symptoms. Even so, Hippocrates's musings offer no hint that these qualities are based in intrinsic, fixed biological characteristics. Discussing the people of the Phasis River region, for example, Hippocrates observes that

The country is marshy and warm and well watered and thickly clothed with vegetation, and there is heavy and violent rainfall there at all seasons. . . . The waters they drink are warm and stagnant and putrified by the sun, and replenished by the rains. And mist envelops the country as a result of the

water. For just these reasons the Phasians have their bodily form different from those of all other men. For in stature they are tall, in breadth they are excessively broad, and no joint or vein is seen upon them. Their complexion is yellow as if they had the jaundice. Their voice is the deepest of all men's because their atmosphere is not clear but foggy and moist. And for bodily exertion they are naturally disinclined.⁶

Despite this Greek tendency to attribute visible differences in appearance and behavior to external factors, Hippocrates also assumed that such acquired characteristics could be passed on to future generations. The distinction we make nowadays between genetic and experientially derived traits would have had little meaning in this context. We can see this when Hippocrates discusses a people who practiced cranial deformation. This practice, well known in historic times, involves binding an infant's head in order to affect the shape of the skull as it grows (a painless process that seems to have no ill effects). Hippocrates realized that the people he referred to as *Macrocephali*, or "Long Heads," owed the remarkably elongated shape of their skulls to the practice of binding them. Anticipating Lamarck by more than two thousand years, however, he asserted that in subsequent generations, their heads proceeded to grow into the same shapes without artificial inducement. "Originally custom was chiefly responsible for the length of the head, but now custom is reinforced by nature. Those who have the longest heads they consider the noblest." He reasoned from this that "the seed comes from all parts of the body."⁷

Differences among ethnic groups intrigued these Greek intellectuals and inspired insights as they reflected on their own societies. Herodotus pondered the changing patterns that had affected the place of women in Greek city-states and expressed ambivalence about alternative family structures. He was sensitive to the range of differences in social norms within the Greek world itself, and his descriptions of other peoples conveyed a spectrum of possibilities and alternative forms of marriage and descent that he observed among surrounding peoples.

But this in itself underscores the Greek view that humanity is all of a piece. The idea that we can draw useful lessons from foreign, exotic peoples implies that at the root of the matter, these peoples are the same as ourselves in fundamental ways. From the Classical Greek perspective, other people are different because of different environments and customs. By implication, these processes operate on a changeable human nature and can lead to many results. The concept that fixed, inherent biological characteristics can set intrinsic parameters for differential human behavior, irrevocably dividing one group from another, was not part of the explanatory tool kit of these ancient thinkers.

The idea that human differences are not biologically fixed, however, does not imply a denial by Classical Greek thinkers that humans are a part of nature. In the centuries after Herodotus, Greek sages were fond of referring to humans as rational, social, or political “animals.” Implicit in their belief in the environment’s power to mold human characteristics is an acceptance of the physical flesh-and-blood aspect of humanness—a biological human nature, in the sense that humans are living denizens of a material world. But any assumption of fixed biological differences among populations was foreign to this concept of what it meant to be human.

How typical were these writers? After all, they represent only a small proportion of the earth’s population in a restricted period of time, even though their ideas have been rich sources for our own. We have no way to survey opinion throughout the world on such matters during those times, but we also have little evidence that a concept of inherent human differences, biological or otherwise, was common anywhere else.

Ethnocentrism beyond the Greek Sphere

In Dynastic Egypt, the population along the lower Nile had a long and volatile relationship with peoples to the south in Nubia toward the river’s headwaters, in what was called the land of Kush. Egyptian art shows individuals with a range of physical features and costumes, including what appear to be examples of the populations referred to for centuries as “Pygmies.” Often these depictions of foreigners showed them with the particular resources or products of their regions, such as ivory.

At times the forces of the Lower Kingdom managed to conquer and occupy part of the Nubian region. In other periods the balance was reversed, and Egypt had at least one Nubian pharaoh. At one point the rulers of Kush formed alliances with Lower Egypt to help defend against common enemies. On another occasion the people of Kush joined with foreigners against the Egyptians. Although this push and shove often involved relationships that were less than congenial—indeed, some very insulting things were said on both sides—we have no evidence that biological traits, as such, were an element in either population’s perception of the other’s qualities. A good deal of royal intermarriage occurred between Kushites and Egyptians. Certainly, people were aware of characteristics that distinguished them; but apparently, they did not consider such characteristics as skin color to be especially salient.

On the other side of the world, the Maya of Yucatán took extreme offense at the Itzá, people who invaded them from the north and who, among other things, showed an untoward enthusiasm for human sacrifice. The Maya were defeated, but not favorably impressed, and referred to the

invaders as immoderate people who "twist their mouths, they wink the eye, they slaver at the mouth . . . they have lost all shame."⁸ In none of this screed, though, is there a sense that these reprehensible people were anything but fully human, no matter how eccentric or obnoxious their manners might be.

To the north, whence came the controversial Itzá, lies the Valley of Mexico. In the fourteenth century it was a cosmopolitan world of city-states with their "floating gardens," or *chinampas*, massive temple pyramids, paved plazas, and dazzling marketplaces. Still beyond that were wandering hunters and gatherers of the vast desert zone. The southern urbanites referred to these desert people as Chichimec, or "children of dogs." This may sound insulting to our ears, but it does not seem to have had the same implications in that time and place. The people we have come to know as Aztec, whose sprawling urban center of Tenochtitlán was one of the world's largest cities of the time, were proud of their Chichimec origins and alluded to their ancestry often. It would be hard to find a sense of intrinsic inferiority here.

On the other hand, the Aztec were contemptuous of many of their neighbors, including the Otomí. One text refers to "a miserable Otomí, a green-head, a thick head, a big tuft of hair on the back of the head, an Otomí blockhead."⁹ Unflattering, to be sure—even downright provocative—but here again, we can find no suggestion that the people whose image they portrayed so rudely were anything but human.

We have no way to be certain that the idea of innate biological difference was not held anywhere on the face of the earth. Very possibly, someone, somewhere, harbored such thoughts. But clearly, numerous peoples in a broad spectrum of times and places were in the habit of explaining the human experience in nonbiological terms—not necessarily because they were more affable, enlightened, or liberal than we are, but because the notion of intrinsic human difference does not seem to have occurred to them. In later chapters we will explore just how, when, and where that perception became established.

European Fantasy

In most of Europe for the next couple of millennia after Herodotus, intellectual interest in other peoples of the world was not a primary concern. When it came to human nature, the major perspectives seem to have been more introspective than cosmopolitan. The long series of European clashes with people of the Middle East, from the Islamic expansion beginning in the seventh century C.E. through the Crusades, left an astonishing lack of insights into other ways of life.

For centuries the most popular European sources of information about foreign peoples were the works of Solenius and Bartholomew of England.

These were mostly apocryphal tales gleaned from Classical writers' more bizarre accounts, colored by the creativity of Pliny the Elder. Some were so improbable that even the Greek historians themselves had refused to vouch for them. Thus, Europeans continued to learn of Amazons, of the one-eyed Arimaspi, of dog-headed people, of the folk with faces in their chests, and of those with one huge foot that they used to shade themselves from the hot tropical sun in fabulous regions far beyond the familiar fields and villages of Europe.

In the fourteenth century, the accounts of the travels of the fictitious John Mandeville—which became immensely popular in Europe and appeared in many translations—epitomize this fascination. These tales were filled with such wonders as “the men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders.”¹⁰ On one of the islands that “Sir John” supposedly visited, were “folk of gret stature as geaunts, and thei ben hidouse to loke upon. And thei had but on eye, and that is in the myddle of the front.”¹¹ On another isle he found a folk of “foul stature” without heads, with eyes in their shoulders, and a mouth in the midst of the chest “as croked as an hors shoo.”¹² He also describes people with flat faces lacking any nose or lips, with small holes for eyes, and little folk whose mouth consisted of a small round hole. Supposedly, there were people somewhere whose ears hung down to their knees, and others that ran fast enough to chase down beasts and eat them. Other exotic folk walked on all fours. These were able to leap lightly into trees “and fro tree to tree as it were squyrelles or apes.”¹³

Ibn Khaldun

We have to look beyond Europe in this period for something resembling a modern approach to understanding human difference. Perhaps one of the most notable achievements in this regard was on the Mediterranean margins of Europe in the work of Ibn Khaldun, an Arab scholar of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Abd-ar-Rahman Ibn Khaldun was born in 1332, a descendant of Arabs who had settled in Spain soon after the Islamic conquest, and spent much of his life in Spain. He was schooled in the medieval Islamic tradition emphasizing the Qur'an, the sciences and mathematics, jurisprudence, and poetry. In some ways his work represents a direct link with some of the more sophisticated Classical insights to which most of Europe was all but oblivious at the time. The work of Ibn Khaldun bypassed much of the stultifying medieval introspection that affected most of the continent during the first fifteen hundred years or so of the Christian era.

Ibn Khaldun traveled widely throughout the Middle East, and at one point in his career he spent several weeks in the company of the near-legendary Tatar

leader Timur (Tamberlane), who had just pillaged Damascus. Ibn Khaldun analyzed forms of human existence from an ecological viewpoint in a massive universal history. This work had little or no effect on European intellectual traditions, however, since none of it was translated into a European language until the nineteenth century. Even now, only the introduction, the *Muqaddimah*, is readily available in English.¹⁴

For Ibn Khaldun, the inevitability of social interaction was a fundamental aspect of human nature. He expressed this as a pragmatic necessity for human existence rather than some sort of intrinsic drive toward gregariousness. Like many writers, he was not above saying uncomplimentary things about various foreign populations, but he stressed the idea that environment and other experiential factors make people what they are. He felt that the various climatic zones of the earth were unevenly favored for producing the best qualities in their populations, asserting, for example, that inhabitants of moderate "middle" zones "are more temperate (well-proportioned) in their bodies, color, character qualities, and (general) conditions."¹⁵ Regarding differences in pigmentation, he objected to the conventional suggestion that African populations had dark skin because they were the descendants of Noah's cursed son Ham.

To attribute the blackness of the Negroes to Ham, reveals disregard of the true nature of heat and cold and of the influence they exercise upon the air (climate) and upon the creatures that come into being in it.¹⁶

Ibn Khaldun also believed that climatic and other factors molded behavioral characteristics. He explained that heat causes an expansion of one's "animal spirit"; hence,

. . . when those who enjoy a hot bath inhale the air of the bath, so that the heat of the air enters their spirits and makes them hot, they are found to experience joy. It often happens that they start singing, as singing has its origins in gladness.¹⁷

As a result, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa tended not only to be darker in pigmentation, but cheerier as well. Compared to the spirits of those dwelling in cooler zones, "theirs are hotter and, consequently, more expanded. As a result, they are more quickly moved to joy and gladness, and they are merrier. Excitability is the direct consequence."¹⁸

One of Ibn Khaldun's more important arguments, though, had to do with the effects of the people's general style of life. He saw a basic dichotomy between sedentary peoples and nomads, or "Bedouin." Both were "natural

groups,” in his view, in the sense that they were inevitable and complementary alternatives. He saw the relationship between them as sequential and developmental, with sedentary societies developing out of the Bedouin way of life. Because of the combined features and demands of Bedouin existence, he felt that nomads were “closer to being good” and superior in many ways.¹⁹ Desert life, he argued, produces a higher degree of bravery among “savage” people.

They are, therefore, better able to achieve superiority and take away the things that are in the hands of the other nation. . . . Whenever people settle in the fertile plains and amass luxuries and become accustomed to a life of abundance and luxury, their bravery decreases to the degree that their wildness and desert habits decreases.²⁰

Ibn Khaldun’s views on the effects of diet on people are consistent with this. He asserted that

. . . the desert people who lack grain and seasonings are found to be healthier in body and better in character than the hill people who have plenty of everything. Their complexions are clearer, their bodies cleaner, their figures more perfect and better, their characters less intemperate, and their minds keener as far as knowledge and perception are concerned.²¹

He saw an inevitable loss of vigor among “savage human beings who [subsequently] become sociable and friendly.”²² In all of this, Ibn Khaldun saw the complexity and diversity of human phenomena from an experiential perspective. He saw that the environment, the climate, the food, and myriad other aspects of life produce effects in human beings, but did not presume that the raw material was inherently different to start with.

Ibn Fadhlān, another Arab scholar and traveler, wrote with some disdain about the behavior he observed among the Rus, Viking settlers along the Volga River.²³ Again, however, nothing in his writings suggests that he considered their gross behavior to be an inherent characteristic. If anything, the implication was that their barbaric manners bespoke a lack of refinement and education.

These Arab writers did not greatly influence the mainstream of European intellectual traditions in the following millennium. We come a bit closer to these traditions in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (also known as St. Augustine). Although Augustine was a North African, his writings took their place among the foundational texts of Western theology. In his *City of God*, he stressed the unity of Christianity and drew a boundary between the community of believers and those outside the faith.²⁴ In doing so, he emphatically ignored regional or ethnic distinctions. To Augustine, acceptance of

the Church and its teachings was the only criterion that separated those in the "City of God" from those outside it.

In Chapters 4 and 5 we will discuss the ways in which this idea changed in European thinking. At this point, though, we might take a wider view of the human experience and consider a broader sample of ways in which people of other cultures have differentiated themselves from others. Before discussing the ways in which people in various collectivities have claimed special distinction, however, we need to consider the nature of the collectivities or "groups" to which we are referring.

Social and Cultural Boundaries

The concept of "society" is often central to discussions of human aggregates, though not without some debate. "Society," it seems, is most useful as an abstraction. When it comes to applying the concept to living populations, however, problems arise. How, for example, do we *delimit* a society? Does the term refer to people who make up a contiguous population in a bounded region and share the same language, culture, and social understandings? How, then, do we treat people who were raised in a particular place but live elsewhere, or individuals from somewhere else who move in? The status of immigrants remains touchy—one of the most divisive issues confronting many modern states, including France, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Is a French citizen who has been living for twenty years in Australia a member of French society? Australian society? Both?

And what about differentiated or even rebellious segments of a population *within* a society? Basque separatists in Spain have fought for generations to achieve independent status; yet Basques have been present in what is now Spain for thousands of years. And what about Native Americans or Australian Aboriginals? Can societies exist *within* societies? How do we deal with "reservations" or "reserves" for indigenous peoples within expansionist states—that is, states in which massive invasions have led to foreigners' becoming the overwhelming majority of the population, as in Australia, the United States, or Canada? And what about social classes?

Ideas of *cultural* differences and boundaries share many of the same difficulties as *social* boundaries. The definition of culture has stimulated long and contentious debate that need not detain us here;²⁵ but regardless of what definition of culture we accept or invent, to what extent is it a useful basis for the discussion of human difference?

Few anthropologists, if any, would dispute the assertion that a great many different cultures exist, or that cultural differences have been a deeply significant aspect of the human experience. Most anthropologists would

also agree that culture is a defining human characteristic that differentiates us from all other species (“tool use” among chimpanzees and some birds notwithstanding). But the *boundaries* of culture present an even more perplexing problem than the boundaries of *society*. To what extent is either “culture” or “society” coterminous with human aggregates or populations in real time and space?

Most nations today are “multicultural.” The very nature of a state system, in fact, is that it incorporates multiple groups who often differ culturally. As we know, this can cause political problems. And many cultures—if we assume that culture involves a shared language, shared beliefs, and so on—transcend any common definition of societal boundaries. One can find enclaves of Italian, Chinese, Polish, Ukrainian, and many other cultures in multiple localities within many countries.

Ethnicity and Ethnocentrism

In the past several decades, some writers have employed the concept of “ethnicity” to address (and avoid) many of the issues we have just raised. Ethnicity is often associated with the idea of “ethnic groups”—a term that appears most frequently in the context of state systems that incorporate diverse populations. But the idea of ethnicity presents yet another problem.

So-called ethnic groups often encompass individuals who have never constituted a “group” of any sort . . . and may not even be aware of the existence of other purported members of their “group.” If they did become aware, in many cases, they might take issue with the assertion that they have anything significant in common with them. To cite a notorious example, do “Hispanics” or “Latinos” in the United States constitute an ethnic group? American citizens of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Argentinean, Bolivian, or Spanish descent would probably dispute this. Brazilian-Americans, of course, can be “Latino,” but not “Hispanic,” since their linguistic heritage is Portuguese. Italians, whose cultural heritage arises directly from Latin-speaking peoples, probably should also be considered Latinos, but for some reason they never are.

The idea of ethnicity bears some resemblance to the concept of culture, but the two are not quite synonymous. In common usage, one does not necessarily lose one’s ethnicity through ignorance of widely shared language or customs. Sometimes a surname is enough for inclusion in an “ethnic group.” Physical appearance often seems to count for something, too. In part, this ambiguity may arise because ethnicity carries with it a sense of genetic as well as cultural heritage. Some writers, in fact, have used ethnicity as an equivalent to “race,” stressing or implying some deeply ingrained or even primordial identity through a shared heritage. Ashley Montagu was

one of the most prominent advocates of adopting "ethnic group" as a substitute for "race."²⁶

This ambiguity has been the basis of much debate. At one end of the discussion, Fredrik Barth and others have stressed the negotiability of ethnic identity.²⁷ In the same vein, many writers have observed that ethnicity tends to be *contingent*. That is, people tend to stress their claims to a particular ethnicity in some situations more than in others. Ethnicity also tends to be "layered." A person might stress her American citizenship while visiting England, but back home in Chicago she might see herself as an Italian-American. Attending an Italian-American Day celebration, though, she might chat with someone whose parents come from Umbria and draw attention to the fact that her own grandparents were from Abruzzi. If the relationship progresses well, she might eventually compare the virtues of these regional cuisines, and perhaps the difference in wines, with her new acquaintance.

Other views of ethnicity emphasize a "primordial" aspect, which bears to some extent on the issue of legitimacy. People might emphasize or downplay some aspects of their ethnic heritage, but to fabricate a heritage altogether would strike most people as illegitimate. An example of this is the anger many Native Americans have expressed when individuals from outside their communities have claimed some tenuous "Indian" ancestry or their contempt for people who have tried to adopt such an identity even without any ancestral claims. Some Native Americans have referred to such individuals as "wannabes." Even within recognized ethnic populations, for that matter, disputes can arise about the genuineness or legitimate status of particular individuals.

The idea of ethnicity also assumes general recognition of common identity by those *outside* the ethnic category as well as by those within it, although some time lag may enter into this. Recognition of ethnicity involves a sense of contrast and entails a dialectical relationship.²⁸ Difference, whether ethnic or otherwise, implies difference *from* something else. Differentiation requires the juxtaposition of two or more categories to allow a sense of the ways in which "we" are different from "them," and "they" are different from "those others."

But what about cases in which a population does not live in juxtaposition, or even close proximity, to any other groups? Such cases are rare, but we do have a few examples. Nineteenth-century accounts of the Polar Inuit of northern Greenland report that until the time of contact with early European explorers, they had believed that they were the only people on earth. In other less extreme cases, groups who have experienced infrequent contact with others often seem to have been relatively un-self-conscious about their own culture, seeing themselves simply as normal human beings and scarcely troubled by the possibility that others might not live the same way.

All of this difference about differences suggests that ethnicity is often most intense when a variety of peoples with different historic backgrounds live in proximity to one another and interact on a frequent basis, bringing contrasts and contested issues more intensely into play. This contentiousness is most typical of state societies. The concept of ethnicity, then, though it may be useful in many respects, is more applicable in some situations than in others.

In the context of state systems, discussions of ethnicity and ethnic interactions often assume competition and even hostility across ethnic boundaries. In many, and perhaps most, cases, such hostility has involved competing material interests such as access to resources, wealth, or power. These issues also appear to be important factors in the promotion of *ethnocentrism*.²⁹

If we define ethnocentrism as a conviction that one's own ways of doing things are superior to those of others—more rational, more moral, more humane, and so on—then ethnocentrism may be a human universal. We must always, of course, allow for the possibility of exceptions. Hypothetically, some damaged or beleaguered populations may consider themselves deeply inferior to others. But for an autonomous sociocultural system to sustain itself for any length of time, it probably is necessary for most of its members to believe that their way of life has value, makes sense, and is preferable to alternatives.

If we associate ethnocentrism with deep *hostility* toward others, however, the frequency is far from universal. As we shall see, many autonomous peoples hold a relativistic view that other groups simply do things in different ways, without necessarily disparaging them for that reason. We should also distinguish cases of active hostility that manifests itself in acts of aggression toward other populations (or perhaps only a wish for aggression that may never occur) from mere disdain for other peoples that does not necessarily involve any particular designs against them.

Locality

Locality is one of the most common bases for distinctions among and between groups. Among Inuit of the Arctic Coast of North America, terms to identify various groupings generally end with the suffix “-miut,” which essentially means “people of” a particular place. “Netsilingmiut,” for example, refers to “the people of the area of Netsiling Lake.”³⁰ These categories are flexible to a degree, since peoples' locations can change. In the Inuit context, however, moving to another region is likely to require additional factors, such as establishing kinship or other personal ties with the inhabitants of the new place.

Throughout most of the North American Arctic, the Inuit population was thinly scattered over a sparse and demanding region, and the carrying

capacity of the environment required them to move frequently over vast areas. Conditions like this are not conducive to bounded social categories of a sort that writers sometimes refer to as "tribes," except along the Bering Sea coast where a richer food supply of sea mammals supported larger, denser populations and made stable communities possible. On parts of that coast, more explicit social boundaries developed in association with distinct settlements, and stable communities could maintain more complex internal structures, including clans. Throughout most of the Arctic, however, differentiation still depended mostly on issues of individual social connections and residence.

While people there may have harbored unflattering views of their neighbors, there is little or no evidence of anything resembling the Euro-American style of racism. In the Arctic we are, of course, referring to a broad population with common origins in a migration or series of migrations from Northeastern Asia only a few thousand years earlier. Few outsiders would have perceived any significant physical differences among the indigenous inhabitants of the region. But the Inuit population also encountered people with different heritages at the southern boundaries of their coastal area.

Déne, Native American speakers of Athapaskan languages, bordered them in the western Subarctic, and Algonkian-speaking Cree (Innu, Naskapi, and Montagnais) lived near their southern range in the east. Relationships between and among these populations were often hostile, and sometimes deadly. Samuel Herne, an eighteenth century agent for the Hudson's Bay Company, describes traveling with a group of Athapaskan-speaking Chipewyan who went far out of their way to attack and kill a group of Inuit at the mouth of the Copper River.³¹ The motive for this attack, and no doubt many others that took place on both sides without ever being recorded, is not clear, and is probably unknowable.

Human beings have often killed other humans, for uncountable reasons. But as we know, killings are not necessarily limited to interactions between distinct groups, ethnic or otherwise. We might recall that in our own society, most homicides occur among family members and close acquaintances.

In the Arctic case, Inuit, Déne, and Cree existed in different social realities. To each population, the others lay beyond the common realms of kinship, language, and culture. It is clear that such a lack of ties can sometimes amount to a lack of any sense of common humanity. Some hunting peoples probably perceived closer ties to some of the game they hunted, based on beliefs about human-animal cooperation, hunting etiquette, and interdependence, than they did to other human groups. This seems to have been especially so in marginal areas of adjoining populations where competition over scarce resources could be an important factor. Although conflict occurred in the Arctic and Subarctic, however, there is little evidence that

it involved a sense of “race” in the conventional sense. Common identity rested on a range of other criteria that surpassed any general sense of physical difference. For that matter, even a stranger among the Inuit who ventured into another territory without any preexisting ties could be in mortal danger from his fellow Inuit.

In Australia, where hunting and gathering peoples also existed in a sparse environment—far warmer, in this case—locality came into play in a somewhat more complicated fashion. Most Australian Aboriginal peoples had special ties to particular regions or localities, but these ties arose from factors other than simple residence. As a number of writers have pointed out, people believed they *belonged to the land*, rather than feeling that they owned or possessed the territory in any sense comparable to the Euro-American view of ownership. They were linked to it in ways that included responsibility for it in a spiritual as well as an ecological sense, and they had prior rights of access to specific localities.³²

The territory was the setting where events had occurred in an earlier time, when ancestral beings had performed deeds that changed the land's contours and created its character. The features of the land and the ceremonies the people carried out in these places reiterated these deeds and linked them to the present. As Tony Swain and others have pointed out, time and terrain were dimensions of the same phenomenon.³³ To visit sacred places was to revisit and relive the events that had begun in the sacred past and continued to define the present. W. E. H. Stanner uses the term “every-when” to express the idea.³⁴

In many Australian groups, when a woman conceived a child, an ancestral spirit that dwelt in a sacred spot nearby entered her body to impart a spiritual identity to the fetus. People who shared the same spiritual essence, or “totem,” shared ties to the same place. Every individual also had a range of other totems or spiritual relationships to localities—the place of one's father's birth, and so on. The net result was a range of ties that were unique for any particular person, but each individual also shared multiple specific ties with many others. This created networks of commonality that overlapped one another throughout the population in complex ways.³⁵

In the Australian case we can see that unlike the Inuit example, locality merged with an array of spiritual connotations that not only anchored each person to the landscape but conveyed inherent qualities to the individual. Unlike the idea of “race,” however, this was less a matter of defining groups with boundaries than positing inter-human and extra-human linkages that varied between local populations and differed among individuals within them.

In Papua New Guinea, the multiple communities of Kainantu District show some minor ethnic and linguistic differences, but within these broad

divisions, adjacent communities share many cultural features.³⁶ To an outsider, the differences among these communities would seem minute and perhaps even indiscernible. As James B. Watson points out, however, the Kainantu recognize fine differences among local groupings. Many of these distinctions have to do with features of material culture, such as the ability to make extraordinarily good hunting nets or special grass skirts that bounce and rustle during dances. They can also involve a proprietary association with particular ceremonies.

Associated with these distinctions, and to some degree arising from them, is a sense that each community's special knowledge is born of its unique experience in that particular locality. Watson quotes a Kainantu man who expressed the nature of local differences by saying that each community consists of "people who have the same story."³⁷ Rather than being a basis for rigid identities, however, the "story" of each community is constantly changing and developing, even as it represents a continuum from the past. At the same time, the Kainantu appear to be non-judgmental about the perceived differences among their various communities. Some are allies and some are enemies, for various historic reasons. Both marriage and, in the recent past, intermittent warfare linked these communities. But these relationships are independent of the sense that each group, quite properly, has its own story. Each local story shares features with other stories, but each also remains profoundly distinct in its own right. Watson notes that "In this light the views of Kainantu peoples virtually preclude a racist or biological approach to ethnic differentiation."³⁸

Certainly we can find thousands of other cases in which locality plays a role in defining group membership. As we can see, however, linkages to and through locality do not necessarily lead to hostility, or even to any pronounced ethnocentrism with regard to others at a greater distance. Nor, for that matter, do they ensure congenial relationships *within* the local sphere. Even small close-knit communities can experience violent internal conflict.

Locality can also have biological implications, of course, if it promotes a degree of genetic isolation. A study of marriages among rural Italian villages at different altitudes in Parma shows that among those highest in the mountains, where travel between communities is difficult, cousin marriages are more common than they are among people of lowland communities.³⁹ No doubt this pattern occurs in other populations as well. Obstacles to interaction clearly can have some isolating effect. But constraints on contact from outside do not necessarily mean that it ceases altogether, and even minimal gene flow can be enough to prevent genetic isolation.

Locality can also be a basis for defining the *nature* of interaction, rather than merely inhibiting or facilitating it. On the South Pacific island of

Tanna in Vanuatu, the population was dispersed in territories the people metaphorically referred to as “canoes.”⁴⁰ The boundaries of each of these territories were matters of consensus, based on a shared story of the process by which humans came to distribute themselves over the land in the course of struggles and interactions with mythical beings. The people of all of the territories, or “canoes,” shared the same corpus of myth, but each canoe also had a proprietary association with its own segment of the myth that distinguished it from all others. As to the island itself, the Tanna people viewed the surrounding sea, which physically separates their island from the rest of the world, not as an isolating barrier but as a *road* to reach other places for trade and various other interactions.

A sense of locality can also involve distinctions among types of environment, rather than simply of place. In many parts of Southeast Asia, distinctions among hill, valley, and coastal people are important bases of identity. The people of tiny Mandok Island of the Siassi chain of Papua New Guinea, who lack sufficient land to support themselves through agriculture, adopted the role of overseas middlemen traders. This was a basis for their disdain for the sedentary horticultural people of Umboi, a larger island nearby, where the people lacked the seafaring and trading skills in which the Mandok prided themselves.⁴¹

As we have seen in the case of the Inuit and other peoples, however, locality can also be a minor or even a shifting criterion for identity. Among the Araweté of tropical Brazil,

The former autonomy of local villages . . . did not imply a fixed or stable composition of its inhabitants . . . village populations varied greatly and the sentiment belonging to each one was apparently not strong. The system of temporary uxoriality gave rise to a constant movement between villages.⁴²

In that vein, we can find many cases in which trade, feasting, and marriage ties temper the importance of identity based on locality. Among the Aruni of the central highlands of Papua New Guinea, for example,

Temporary alliances and ties of descent and affinity linked each group with a number of neighbors; however, none of these links were considered binding. Faced by the constant threat of attack and usurpation of rights to land, each group stood in potential or actual opposition to the others.⁴³

The Mae Enga of the Papua New Guinea highlands, like many other peoples in that region, lived in communities with a core of patrilineal clan members, but each community had complex relationships with other similar communities. They fought sporadically, though generally with a low

level of casualties. As among many Papua New Guinea highland peoples, such small-scale conflicts, which often involved revenge for earlier killings, tended to maintain local group boundaries. Yet in a sense, these conflicts also perpetuated a consistent *relationship* among communities, and marriages generally took place *between* communities rather than within them. M.J. Meggitt quotes a Mae Enga man who explained, "we marry our enemies."⁴⁴ This pattern produced a network of kin ties among chronically hostile settlements.

Reciprocal ceremonial exchanges and feasts, though ostensibly friendly interactions, also amounted to displays of strength, including military strength, in the guise of hospitality. These exchanges, which were obligatory as a matter of pride, linked the communities in constellations of obligations and occasions for self-assertion.

In such cases the definition of social boundaries can be unclear. Shared cultural understandings, language, economic exchanges, and kinship ties bind even hostile local aggregates to one another, and each community constitutes part of a larger system with indefinite parameters. Differences based on locality might be definitive at a given moment, but they also tend to shift over longer periods of time, depending on such factors as group misfortunes, crop yields, and the qualities of local leadership..

Boundaries can also be problematic even in cases when co-residence seems to be the major criterion for belonging. Among the Araweté of Brazil, merely to join a community and plant a garden there seems to have been sufficient for strangers to incorporate themselves into the group.⁴⁵ In practice, this often meant subsequent intermarriage and eventually, a merging of the newcomers and their descendants through establishment of kinship ties.

The Tapirapé of Brazil also accepted newcomers. They did, however, believe that some of their neighbors, especially their longstanding enemies, had arisen from different mythical ancestors and therefore were intrinsically distinct from themselves.

The Carajá are like dogs," they explained many times, "They sleep on mats on the ground and do not have hammocks." The Tapirapé believed that the Carajá were descendants of a large river serpent and could not be trusted.⁴⁶

On rare occasions, however, they even allowed some of these people to join their communities.

The issue of territorial boundaries was also a complex matter for the Basseri nomads of Iran. The nomads recognized different tribal identities among themselves involving conventional rights to pasturage for their sheep and goats. These were distinctly bounded migration routes, or "tribal roads"

(*il rah*), that amounted to long narrow strips up the mountain slopes allowing each tribe access to seasonal pastures at different altitudes. But a still broader difference existed between the nomads and the agricultural villagers who lived along the nomads' seasonal routes. This was a mutually beneficial relationship based on differences in subsistence patterns. Nomads traded animal products to the villagers in exchange for grain and other goods, and after the harvest the villagers allowed the nomads to graze their animals on the stubble in their fields, adding fertility to the soil.⁴⁷

The issue was still more complex, however, since according to Fredrik Barth, the nomads over the long term experienced population growth beyond what their herds could sustain. As a result, nomads who lost their animals, or who for some other reason were no longer able to maintain that style of life, could settle in the villages. Nomads became villagers. Many villagers were former nomads whose relatives continued to move with the herds.

For the Kaulong of New Britain in the South Pacific, the importance of interpersonal links to other communities took precedence over any sense of local community membership. According to Jane Goodale, "The model is one of overlapping ancestral place-oriented cognatic kindreds, which are arranged conceptually in a hierarchical scheme according to their historic setting in time and space."⁴⁸ Despite this association with locality, however,

What is reflected in the exchange system is the independent autonomy of the individual over anything resembling a social order. The self-developing individual Kaulong typically expresses little concern with any larger aggregate of people beyond a personal egocentric network of exchange relationships.⁴⁹

On the other hand, locality in the sense of broader regionalism can often serve as a summarizing metaphor for historical and cultural differences. In Italy, a Tuscan's reference to "southerners" (*meridionali*) generally has a rich array of connotations, few of them complimentary. These can range from implications regarding personal hygiene and morality to a suggested propensity for banditry. A Tuscan speaker may even stamp the heel to emphasize the locality of the southern Italian "boot." This view shifts with location, however. As one Tuscan pointed out, the "south" becomes more inclusive as one moves north.

Locality in Britain also connotes ethnic and historical differences. Scottish, Irish, and Welsh relationships with the English population remain ambivalent in many ways. In the United States, "North" and "South" were not originally associated with major differences in historic or ethnic origins among the majority populations, most of whom originated in northwestern Europe. The history of plantation slavery and the Civil War in which it

culminated, however, with subsequent perceptions of regional grievances and interests, have resulted in a clear divergence, notwithstanding the ease of transportation and communication in recent times. In many ways this regional difference has approached the level of ethnicity, including the perception of dialect as a marker of identity.

Finally, in many parts of the world a distinction rests on rural versus urban localities. This has its roots in the historic relationship between rural peasantry and city dwellers, which has usually involved significant disparities in power and wealth. As numerous studies have shown, the peasant-urban axis in Europe, Central America, South America, the Middle East, and Asia has involved connotations of ignorance versus sophistication, poverty versus wealth, and vulnerability versus power. Despite the disappearance of peasantry in many parts of the world and the migration of urbanites to the countryside, echoes of such categorization remain in the terms *campesino*, *peon*, "bumpkin," and "hillbilly," or, for that matter, even the term "peasant" itself. These distinctions arise from state systems in which a large rural peasantry has historically played an essential role in producing food, but has had little power.⁵⁰

Kinship

We might assume that of all the criteria for defining group membership, kin relationships are probably the least ambiguous. We often think of kinship in terms of such straightforward biological relationships as the mother-child linkage. It is important to keep in mind, though, that kin ties and kin groupings essentially are social constructs. In some cases kin ties can be fictitious from a biological standpoint, unless we conceive of biological ties in a far more universal sense. If kinship were simply a matter of biology, kinship systems would be uniform among the peoples of the world, since the biology of conception and childbirth is universal. Anthropology students could then be spared the angst of learning about the variety of kinship systems that often seem so daunting in their variety and complexity.

Numerous examples underscore the socially-constructed nature of kinship. One could argue that adoption, which occurs in many societies, is basically an artificial replication of a "real" biological relationship, though other cases are a bit more complicated. The Napoleonic Code specifying that the husband of the mother is the father of the child becomes a bit more problematic. As we know, this is not necessarily always the case in a biological sense—a fact that has provided material for many stories, songs, poems, novels, and dramas, both tragic and comic. In other cases the imposition of social categories on biology is even clearer. Many societies draw a

sharp distinction between cousins who are children of the father's brothers and those who are children of the father's sisters. For a man in such a society, the father's brother's daughter is his sister, with all the restrictions and obligations that such a relationship entails. His father's sister's daughter, on the other hand, might be eligible as a marriage prospect. Biologically, there is no difference between the two; they are equal in terms of genetic distance. Socially, however, each is an entirely different sort of being.

Whether kinship accurately reflects biology or not, it is a common and powerful means of distinguishing one category of person from another, or in some cases, in distinguishing persons from nonpersons. Kinship is often the primary basis of social identity. Notwithstanding the American ideal of rugged individualism, it is a truism (and true) that in many, if not most societies of the world, "who" one is depends on who one's relatives are. Identity amounts to one's place in the network of kinship. Kinship is also, in many cases, the primary criterion for defining group boundaries.

Kinship can be an *a priori* criterion for group membership. Demonstrable kinship can all but determine whether one is "in" or not. But it can also be a *post hoc* rationale to regularize or even create relationships. Kin ties often are fabricated, with mutual consent, as a means of creating a basis either for linkages between individuals or for the inclusion of a desired individual in a larger group. Anthropologists sometimes refer to this as "fictive" kinship. Even more than fictive kinship, however, the most common means of creating kinship ties is through marriage, even if, in some cases, the marriage itself may be short-lived.

The structure of kinship ties not only varies considerably from one society to another, but it can also be flexible *within* a given social system. Yet sometimes, identity or group membership rests on much more rigid rules of known descent from a common ancestor through one line. Some peoples specify this descent through the maternal line, while for others, the paternal line is primary. In either case, anthropologists generally refer to this as "unilinear descent," or descent through one line. As Robert Lowie notes with regard to the matrilineal Hopi, a man "who is actually three quarters Navajo is, from the native angle, wholly Hopi because his mother's mother was Hopi."⁵¹

In some societies the father's identity is enough to define the identity of the child. In still others, one's place in the community can rest on *any* kin ties on *either* side, sometimes even if these are only ties through marriage. The Pacaá Nova of Brazil

all identify themselves as *wari*, in opposition to neighboring and sometimes linguistically related groups such as the More, Huanyam, and Jarú, who are usually referred to as *wijam*, (literally, outsiders or enemies).⁵²

The Pacaa Nova recognize three degrees of *wari* identity. The closest are "our relatives," the people whom one can call on for help and whom one cannot marry." Somewhat less intimate are kin "we don't know." Finally, there are *wari* in "other settlements," or people on "the other side of the river." Outside this range are people who are not kin. On the other hand, unlike *wari*, people who are not kin are also potential spouses and therefore potential producers of offspring who *are* "blood" relatives, or *wari*.⁵³

At the other end of the spectrum, people in some groups simply declare or create kin or kin-like ties in order to justify and regularize relationships among those who are not already related. When this occurs, such "fictive" kin ties usually carry obligations and expectations that are comparable to those associated with "actual" kinship.

Some aspects of unilineal descent in kin-based societies resemble one of the earliest uses of the term "race" in European writings. In one archaic European meaning, "race" carried the sense of a running stream of water (as in "a racing stream"). Applied to the human context, it often implied an elite line of descent, or nobility, as distinguished from the general populace. We can sense this meaning in references to a "noble race" or a "race of warriors." In that sense, the term "race" still usually referred to (or laid claims to) an elite status arising from specific heritage, as distinct from the population in general, regardless of what we might consider shared *ethnic* identity. This older meaning often had more to do with an incipient differentiation of class *within* a population than being a collective means of differentiating one population from another.

But often, kinship functions as a more rigid criterion for group membership. The Herero of southern Africa, for example, considered themselves to be united through common patrilineal descent from a single ancestor. The term for this ancestor was *Mukuro* ("old one"). The term could also mean "god" or refer to senior elders of patrilineages, ancestors, or religious leaders.

Mukuro in that sense means the ancestor of all Herero, the oldest of the old men . . . the Herero [believe] that their sacred cattle, the ritual that surrounds them, and all of their customs were given to them by *Mukuro*.⁵⁴

One consequence of this belief, of course, was the exclusion of all others from this common identity.

Somali society also has rested historically on a concept of segmentary lineages. It entails a sense that ultimately, all Somalis descend from a single common ancestor, despite the notorious inter-clan rivalries that have often manifested themselves in violence. As we know from events over the past few decades, the sense of unity among Somalis has not always been sufficient

to eliminate bloodletting that reached levels of fierce conflict in the 1990s under competing warlords who claimed leadership of different clans and continues to threaten Somalia's national stability.⁵⁵ This concept of ultimate common descent has, however, contributed to a strong sense of Somali identity in opposition to other populations.

The Kikuyu of Kenya saw themselves as direct descendants of two founding figures, Gikuyu and his wife Muumbi, who were created by the supreme deity Ngai. Gikuyu and Muumbi had nine daughters who were ancestral to the clans. Despite the female origins of the clans, however, clan membership among the Kikuyu passed along the male line through descent from the nine young men who married the founding daughters.⁵⁶ In the southern Sudan, the cattle-raising Nuer and Dinka also derived their distinct identities through descent along the male line, and the inheritance of cattle from father to son reinforced these bonds.

In the southwestern United States, the Western Apache employed the principle of unilineal descent through the mother's line as a criterion for relationship. Members of the same clan and the same generation referred to one another as "brother" and "sister" (or more literally, "my sibling of the same sex," or "my sibling of the opposite sex"). Clan members of different generations used the terms for grandparent/grandchild or for parent/child, as appropriate.⁵⁷ But in this case there was little or no overall sense of "Apache society" as a bounded, corporate group with defined membership. The "group boundaries" of an individual tended to end at the farthest extent of known kin ties and clan relationships.

Yet paradoxically the Western Apache, as well as other Apachean populations, seem to have had no problem in adopting individuals who were not Apache, or in some cases not even Native Americans, and incorporating them into their communities as full members. Generally this involved the bestowal of fictive kinship ties.⁵⁸ Nor was clan membership, adopted or not, a rigid criterion for interpersonal relationships. Members of a clan considered themselves to be more or less closely related to several other clans, to the extent that intermarriage between members of those related clans was prohibited as incestuous. But marriages between unrelated clans established longstanding affinal (or "in-law") relationships. People who became relatives by marriage also had a range of mutual responsibilities and obligations.

Viewing the Western Apache social sphere on a large scale, this array of kin ties—the immediate family, the extended family or *gotá*, the clan, the close ties to other clans, and ties through marriage—amounted to a network of bonds for each individual that comprised his or her social universe. But this sense of relationship was not the same as membership in any "Apache society" or "Apache tribe." For one thing, its range and set of relationships

differed among individuals. The boundaries of the Western Apache social universe—the range of people who mattered, and toward whom one had special bonds—ended at the extremes of known kin ties.⁵⁹ Beyond that range, non-relatives—even other *Ndé*, or “Apache,” to whom one was not related—were essentially outsiders. The term for such people beyond the constellation of kin ties was *indá*, which means “enemy.” Social obligations did not apply.

Other Apachean populations such as the Chiricahua or Mescalero, who had bilateral kinship and recognized the mother’s and father’s side equally, did not have clans, but they shared this emphasis on kin networks rather than collective or “group” identity. They recognized cultural and linguistic similarities between themselves and other Apache populations in contrast with Mexican, Anglo-American, and other Native American peoples, but this did not prevent them in many cases from viewing other Apache peoples as enemies.

Like the Apache and other peoples we have considered, the Tsimihety of Madagascar also placed great importance on kin ties. Yet in this case, too, kinship did not operate as a boundary-maintaining principle for the Tsimihety population as a whole. In contrast to the Western Apache, the Tsimihety were strongly patrilineal, and for a male the most significant ties were to his ancestors in the paternal line and to his children and grandchildren, to whom he would eventually become an ancestor. Women also maintained ties to their patrilineages. They could express these ties in various ways, including the choice to be buried with their patrilineal ancestors. Beyond that, the Tsimihety recognized a range of kin on both sides to varying degrees of distance. This network of kin did not, however, extend to include all Tsimihety. Peter Wilson notes that

Although distinguished by a name, there is no political or social basis whereby the Tsimihety can be defined as a tribe. There is no hierarchical organization, political or social that could facilitate the mobilization of all Tsimihety for a specific purpose, no common ancestor posited in genealogies or in a mythology, and no pretense of alliance.⁶⁰

Among Aboriginal Australian populations, a range of variations on kinship served as criteria for identity, but here the meaning of kinship itself extended beyond what we have seen in other examples. In many groups a child would be a member of his or her father’s clan or lineage, but as we noted earlier, most Aboriginal peoples also believed that when a woman conceived a child, an ancestral spirit entered her body as she passed near a sacred place. This established a lifelong identity that the child shared with other people who were conceived near the same spot, regardless of whatever ties of biological descent they might or might not have.

An individual's place of birth would also create a tie to the locality and to other persons who shared such a link with the same locality. A person also had ties to the home territory of the father's people and to other people who shared the same ties. Thus, throughout a regional population, multiple "kin" relationships linked people through association with sacred places, place of birth, patrilineal descent, marriage, and so on. As we have noted, each individual's network of relationships, based on far more than simple European concepts of kinship, differed from anyone else's but also overlapped those of many others.

Collectively these networks extended to the range of regional populations. People from other regions might visit a different territory, but generally they did so only with the permission of the hosts.⁶¹ It would be rare for a proprietary group to deny such a request, but visitors' failure to submit it would constitute a grievous discourtesy. This protocol constituted a mutual recognition of different collective identities whose bases included kin ties in the conventional Western sense, but involved far more than that. The rules of relationships to territory, land, and locality were strict, well-defined, and generally acknowledged.

Relationships were far more flexible in other places, as we have seen. Inuit peoples on the Arctic Coast of North America made extensive use of fictive kinship. Although the identity of Inuit groupings generally referred to their localities, most people within such local populations would be relatives through descent or marriage. The limited carrying capacity of this environment, however, meant that local groups were limited in size and scattered over vast distances. This, of course, led to one of the most fundamental problems of the human experience. How can people co-exist? Or in this case, how can people who rarely see one another and who need mutual access to scarce resources develop a non-lethal means of interacting when they *do* meet?

Chance encounters among strangers in remote areas are inherently dangerous. Anything could happen, unless both parties share some sort of understanding—a "social script"—that can offer some sort of mutual predictability. Kinship does precisely that for people who accept the importance of obligations to relatives. Conversely, for those who fall outside that category, this can also imply a lack of social responsibility. But the demographic situation in the Arctic limits the range of possible kin ties. Large families were generally impractical, and even if that were not the case, a person with even the largest family can have only so many sisters, brothers, cousins, and in-laws.

One solution, as we have seen, was to create additional ties that replicated kinship—ties that were fictive in one sense, but were socially real. One strategy Inuit used was wife-sharing as a means of creating bonds

between men. Men who had slept with the same woman (ideally with the agreement of all parties) became "relatives." This not only established a life-long bond between the men, but generally created a bond among their children, who had a relationship comparable to cousins. People also used meat-sharing relationships, in which hunters habitually gave one another specific cuts of game they killed. These practices could strengthen relationships that already existed, but they could also create fictive kin ties between otherwise unrelated friends and allies.⁶²

Once again we have a situation in which no "tribe"-like entity or any other sort of distinctly bounded social groupings existed. An individual's social universe consisted of his or her ties to specific people. The theme of biological kinship lay at the base of these, but fictive kinship extended personal ties far beyond the limits of descent and marriage. Ideally, such ties would tend to assure mutual assistance in times of need, and as we have noted, the absence of such ties could be deadly.

The !Kung Ju/hoansi of southern Africa also used fictive kinship to extend bonds far beyond the capacities of descent and marriage. In the past, the situation of the Ju//hoansi was similar in some ways to that of the Inuit, although they inhabit a southern desert region. Their survival as hunters and gatherers in a sparse environment, like that of the Inuit, dictated a thin scattering of the population and the capacity to move freely over large areas.⁶³

A child among the Ju/hoansi would ideally receive the same name of a grandparent of the same sex, which implied some linkage of identity. As in many societies, the grandparent/grandchild ties involved a relaxed, jocular, teaching relationship. In contrast, the parents and the parents' siblings stood in a relationship of authority to the child and commanded some degree of deference and formal respect.

Ju/hoansi names were gender-specific. Names for females were entirely different from names for males. The possible choices of names for each sex, moreover, were limited to about thirty or so, and consequently, many people throughout the population had the same names. A crucial aspect of this pattern is the expectation that the behavior one displayed toward parents and grandparents should also apply to others who had the same names as those relatives. If a man should encounter a stranger with the same name as his grandfather, then a joking, relaxed interaction was appropriate. On the other hand, if the stranger had his father's name or the name of any of his father's or mother's brothers, he was expected to treat him with respect. This system had powerful implications for marriage possibilities. A man should not, for example, marry a woman who was otherwise unrelated to him if she happened to have the same name as his mother, or one of his mother's or father's sisters.

If one stranger should have the same name as the other's father, but the other had the same name as the second's grandfather, they could resolve this contradiction by determining which of the two was older than the other. The senior person's obligations would prevail. A crucial aspect of this pattern was that once again, a skein of fictive kinship extended ties that carried a range of obligations and restrictions far beyond the extent of actual kinship—in this case throughout the entire regional population.

The Kamba of Kenya also employed fictive kinship. Like the neighboring Kikuyu, the Kamba have clans based on patrilineal descent; but according to Middleton and Kershaw, sworn or "blood" brotherhood between two unrelated men could also create a strong bond.

Sworn brotherhood is a form of relationship which exists both internally in Ukamba [Kamba land] and "also between the Kamba and" members of other tribes. In both cases the essential ceremony consists in each person consuming a little of the other's blood.⁶⁴

This sworn brotherhood was equivalent to actual brotherhood. It carried the same implications of responsibility and obligation that brothers with the same parents would share.

There are equally strong obligations to mutual assistance and their children are considered as closely related as are the children of brothers; e.g. marriage between them would be regarded as incestuous.⁶⁵

The authors state that this relationship was permanent and could not be resolved even by mutual agreement. Violation of the bond could result in misfortune, or even death.

Another form of fictive kinship among the Kamba could arise if one man was about to kill another. The one in danger could create a bond with his would-be killer if he could manage somehow to suck the breast of the latter's wife or daughter before the fatal blow fell. This desperate action apparently established a filial relationship and created a bond that also extended to the wives and children of the two men.⁶⁶

In many Pacific island societies, other forms of kin-like ties involving trade partners on different islands could also have the strength of brotherhood. Alice Pomponio notes the institution of *bisnis brata* (business brother in Tokpisin) in islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea. People may reinforce such ties with adoption or marriages between their children.⁶⁷

Finally, the important institution known as *compadrazgo* in Latin America represents another form of fictive kinship. In this case the parents of a child ask a non-relative to be godparent. The person could

either be a close friend of the family, or in some cases, a wealthy or prominent *padrón*. Ideally, godparents should take a lifelong interest in the child's well-being and in effect, become co-parents, or *compadres*, with the child's actual parents.

Subsistence Patterns

Ways of making a living can be important aspects of identity, and they can lead to conflict as well as compatibility. The Nuer of the Southern Sudan, like many of their neighbors, define themselves first and foremost as cattle-raising people. The neighboring Dinka share the same subsistence pattern. The Nuer and Dinka also share a linked history. Culturally and linguistically, they are almost identical. Yet these two populations have long been enemies, and they take pride in raiding one another for cattle. It is a common assertion among pastoralists in this part of Africa that *ngai*, the creator, gave all the cattle in the world to their particular group. When they raid their neighbors for cattle, therefore, they are merely reclaiming their own.

Rarely, however, do either of these groups raid the nearby Shilluk people. The Shilluk do not raise cattle, and therefore they are of little interest to the pastoralists. The Shilluk peoples' lack of cattle, in effect, defines them as a different order of being who are not particularly worthy of attention. As one Nuer man put it,

They have no cattle. The Nuer only raid people who possess cattle. If they had cattle we would raid them and take their cattle, for they do not know how to fight as we fight.⁶⁸

It is clear that similarity or even shared identity does not necessarily imply amity—nor does difference necessarily lead to hostility.

Historically, the Kikuyu of central Kenya have inhabited a region with a diverse range of neighbors. These include other Bantu speakers, such as the Kamba, and the Maa-speaking Maasai.⁶⁹ A Kikuyu myth of origin accounts for the differences among these three. According to the Kikuyu tradition, the world's creator Mumbere had three sons—Gikuyu, Masai, and Kamba—to whom he offered the choice of bow, spear, or digging stick. "A similar myth says that the three sons were Masai, Gikuyu and Dorobo; Masai was told to hold the plains and keep livestock, Gikuyu was told to live by agriculture, and Dorobo to hunt game."⁷⁰

The Dorobo consist of a number of small hunting and gathering populations scattered among agricultural groups in East Africa. Some of the Dorobo may be descendants of people who inhabited the area before

the Bantu-speaking ancestors of Kikuyu and the ancestors of the Maasai arrived from the east and the north. In recent times, however, many Dorobo have differed little from the Kikuyu, Kamba, and Maasai populations except for the fact that they hunted and gathered wild foods rather than making a living raising livestock or planting crops. Similarly, the hunting and gathering Okiek of Kenya speak Maa and interact reciprocally with many Maasai and Samburu groups, often trading wild products such as honey for other foods.

In recent history, relations between the Kikuyu and Maasai have been ambivalent. According to late nineteenth and early twentieth century sources, a belt of no-man's land a few miles wide separated the forest with its Kikuyu gardens from the relatively open dry plains where the Maasai herded their cattle, sheep, and goats. Despite (or perhaps because of) this ecological differentiation, trade, temporary alliances, and even intermarriage took place between these populations. Such interactions, however, do not seem to have eliminated the differences between the two groups or eroded their distinct identities. Sporadic raiding was also an aspect of their relationship. Nonetheless, as Middleton and Kershaw note, "The Masai were invincible on their own terrain, the plains, but were easy victims for the Kikuyu if they ventured into the forest, where they were killed by the arrows and staked war-pits that awaited them."⁷¹

Despite such intermittent tensions and conflicts, however, we see once again that differentiation associated with the exploitation of contrasting environmental zones worked to the advantage of both groups. The maintenance of differences between them worked to their mutual benefit. Situational alliances, trade, and even assistance in times of difficulty constituted a persistent undercurrent of the otherwise chronically volatile relationships.

We can compare this with relationships between the Samburu and Somalis in central Kenya. Both populations rely on livestock in an arid region where good pasture is scarce and precious, and no doubt this has played a large part in the chronic hostilities between them. In the 1960s, according to Samburu elders, Somalis and their herds gradually drifted into Samburu territory near the Wasu Nyeru River. For a time the two groups co-existed peacefully on opposite banks. According to Samburu elders, however, one day the Samburu noticed that the Somali women and children were nowhere in sight. Shortly after that, the Somalis suddenly attacked, causing heavy casualties and the loss of many animals.

By the 1990s, the Samburu had long since retaken the area, and the Somali pastoralists had withdrawn to the east. In 1995, however, a Samburu elder noted that Somali herds had approached again and were just out of sight over the horizon, and he believed they were drifting closer. Samburu

elders expressed concern that the younger men in the current warrior age grade were not taking the threat seriously because they had not experienced the fighting of three decades earlier.⁷² Within the next year, in fact, Somalis once again advanced and attacked Samburu cattle camps, starting an outbreak of fighting that continued off and on for several months.

In North America, other examples illustrate the likelihood that although different forms of subsistence can promote group differentiation, similar ways of making a living can often be conducive to conflict. On the high plains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the introduction of horses made it possible to exploit the vast herds of buffalo more effectively. Numerous populations from the margins of the Plains abandoned their old means of subsistence, which had ranged from river bottom agriculture to desert hunting and gathering, to become mounted buffalo hunters. Ultimately, indigenous warfare arose from competition over basic resources—bison, and the horses necessary to hunt them. Sporadic conflict, embellished by the development of an elaborate warrior complex, lasted until the buffalo herds all but disappeared—largely through the efforts of the United States government to diminish the food supply of the Plains groups.

The case of the Wendat ("Huron") and the Hodenosaunee ("Iroquois") of the northeastern United States offers yet another example. Both were Iroquoian speakers with similar cultures who lived in stable villages and subsisted on a mixed economy of agriculture, wild foods, and trade. Both populations were matrilineal, and each had a range of complex political alliances that amounted to internal non-aggression pacts among their constituent groups. Yet from late prehistoric times to the mid seventeenth century, when the Hodenosaunee essentially destroyed the Wendat as a society, the rival alliances carried out continuous raids on one another that eventually reached an approximation of total war.

Cases such as these suggest that similarity that involves direct competition for the same resources is often likely to promote hostility, whereas difference can be a basis for mutually beneficial interaction. Clearly this was the case among the East African cattle herders we discussed earlier. In the case of the Iroquoian speakers of the Northeast, whatever competition might have existed at an earlier time became far more intense when both populations became engaged in the fur trade. The main resource, the American beaver, quickly became depleted in local areas, forcing competition over trade routes from the interior where the furs were still available.⁷³

Conversely, populations who occupy different ecological zones or who exploit different resources in the same broad environment often maintain peaceful relationships despite historical, cultural, and linguistic differences, since each has something to offer the other. In some cases, this might even

amount to mutual dependency. If so, the *perpetuation* of differences between these populations, reinforced on each side by a “healthy ethnocentrism,” can work to the advantage of both.

The Mbuti of the Congolese rainforests and the neighboring Bantu-speaking villagers offer a classic example of this. The Mbuti, people of the forest, provided game and hides for the villagers in return for agricultural products and iron tools. While the Mbuti considered the deep forest to be their domain, the villagers tended to avoid it, and the Mbuti did all they could to encourage the villagers’ misgivings about the forest as a dark, spiritually dangerous region. Each group maintained a sense of superiority over the other—ethnocentrism that no doubt helped to maintain boundaries between them.⁷⁴ It seems evident that any significant merging of the two would ultimately have been detrimental to their complementary relationship and to the well-being of both.

The Wendat or Huron discussed above provide another example of reciprocal relationships among different ethnic groups. Despite their long-standing conflict with their linguistic relatives the Hodenosaunee, the Wendat generally maintained peaceful trade relationships with Algonkian-speaking peoples to the north. Wendat territory was in the northernmost limit of the zone where agriculture was feasible. North of that region, the growing season was too short for reliable crops. The Wendat exploited this ecological boundary by trading agricultural products from the south, such as corn and tobacco, for goods the Algonkian hunting peoples could provide, such as hides, meat, and black squirrel skins. Once again, differences between these groups provided a basis for their generally peaceful interactions rather than conflict.⁷⁵

Language

Language difference is one of the most common markers of group boundaries, although generally it is more a reflection of historic separation than a primary cause of it. Indeed, people have often attempted to overcome language barriers in order to facilitate interaction. The “Chinook jargon” of the Pacific Coast of North America served as a trade language or “lingua franca” among diverse peoples whose own languages were mutually unintelligible. In East Africa, Swahili, a Bantu language with many Arabic influences that originated along the coast of the Indian Ocean, has served much the same purpose. The same is true of TokPisin in Papua New Guinea, Pijin in the Solomon Islands, Bislama in Vanuatu, and even the sign language of the North American Plains. The use of English, Spanish, or Arabic to overcome local linguistic diversity in many parts of the world are additional

examples. It appears that although language difference is an obstacle to communication, it is a barrier that many peoples in many times and places have strived to overcome. The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel—in which the loss of mutual intelligibility comes as a divine punishment—reflects this frustration.

Language can also, however, be exploited to emphasize distinctness. When Western Apache children in Arizona in the 1960s were asked whether they thought their non-Apache school teachers should learn Apache, they overwhelmingly answered “no.”⁷⁶ Apparently the children felt that their language was a special possession that set them apart, and they thought that outsiders should not have access to it.

As we know, dialect can also be a matter of hierarchical class distinction in state systems. The difference between Oxonian and Cockney versions of English is obvious to any Londoner, and numerous playwrights, screen writers, and novelists have exploited these differences to dramatic effect. In immigrant communities in many state systems, a shared language that is unintelligible to the rest of the population can be a basis for discrimination against them, but it can also be a source of solidarity and an affirmation of identity. And although one can acquire a new language, unlike a new place of birth or a new lineage, it is difficult, in adulthood, to acquire the fluency of a native speaker, as anyone knows who has tried. One’s first language usually leaves an indelible effect, acting as a marker that can lead to inclusion or exclusion. Language has also been a major aspect of conquest, as the historic spread of English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, and other languages shows. Hundreds of local languages have disappeared as a result of colonial conquests and occupations, and hundreds more are on the verge of disappearance in the post-colonial era.

Special Qualities

Beyond these factors, and incorporating many of them, most populations have a strong sense of special qualities that set them apart from other peoples. It has become an anthropological cliché that the terms many people use to refer to themselves simply mean “people,” or perhaps “the true people.” Cayapó of the Brazilian rainforest have referred to themselves as “we true Indians,” in contrast to their neighbors. The terms “*Inuit*,” “*Diné*” (Navajo), and “*Nde*” (Western Apache) all carry the same general meaning, to cite a few examples among hundreds. Such terms may also offer more explicit information about their own special qualities in contrast with other groups: *badu al badu*, “nomads of the nomads,”⁷⁷ *wai-teri*, “fierce people,”⁷⁸ *hopi*, peaceful people,⁷⁹ *mutua*, “people of the islands,”⁸⁰ or *tiwi*, “the only people.”⁸¹

Often, groups refer to unique events of the past in order to assert or validate their uniqueness. The Ndembu of southern Africa claim descent “from the land of the great Congo chief Mwantiyanvwa . . . Whatever time and raids have done to them, they say, ‘we are the people of Mwantiyanvwa, and that is that!’”⁸² Among the Nuer,

initiation rites, more than anything save language, distinguish Nuer culture and give Nuer that sense of superiority which is so conspicuous a trait of their character.⁸³

For the neighboring Dinka, long enemies of the Nuer, their

cultural continuity . . . is often ascribed to their pride and ethnocentrism, which are conspicuous in their own name for themselves. They do not call themselves “Dinka,” but *Monyjang*, which means ‘The Man [or the husband] of Men.’ This denotes that they see themselves as the standard of what is normal for the dignity of man and asserts their superiority to ‘the others’ or ‘foreigners.’⁸⁴

In Micronesia, the Pulapese of Truk see themselves as superior canoeists, most especially in comparison with their longstanding adversaries of nearby Puluwat.⁸⁵ The Tapirapé of Brazil believed that the neighboring Cayapó were descended from a wood tick and therefore were especially dangerous because they lacked human feelings. The nearby Carajá, moreover, “were descendants of a large river serpent and could not be trusted.”⁸⁶ “From the primordial snakes of the flood, the Tapirapé told me [Wagley], had descended the people of the Carajá tribe. ‘They [the snakes] had circles under their eyes’ (the tribal facial marking of the Carajá).”⁸⁷

Many Pueblo peoples of the southwestern United States have complex ceremonies and beliefs that emphasize their place at the center of the universe. A small hole in the plaza in many of these communities marks the place where all humans and animals emerged from underground to populate the earth. Complex accounts of the process of emergence describe the dispersal of other humans in various directions away from the central, sacred place of first arrival at the surface.⁸⁸

The fundamental social symbols of a people often convey a rich array of associations that affirm social identity. Among the Ndembu, for example, initiation rituals take place under the *mudyi* tree, or “milk tree,” a name that refers to the latex sap it exudes.

At one level of abstraction the milk tree stands for matriliney, the principle on which the continuity of Ndembu society depends . . . the principle of

matriliney . . . itself symbolizes the total system of interrelationships between groups and persons that makes up Ndembu society . . . At its highest level of abstraction, the milk tree stands for the unity and continuity of Ndembu society.⁸⁹

Indigenous minorities within state systems who feel that their special identities are in danger of being submerged may focus on selected practices with particular symbolic power to stress their uniqueness. Maori funeral rituals in modern New Zealand can serve the purpose, reaffirming Maori identity in the contemporary context, in which many *pakeha* (non-Maori New Zealanders) express the view that modern Maori are "no longer real."⁹⁰

Some populations have also claimed a shared identity with others in order to distinguish themselves from yet another group. During the Mexican war for independence from Spain, for example, the concept of *indigenismo*, a shared heritage with the great indigenous cultures of the past—particularly Aztec—served as an ideological basis for Mexican separation from the Spanish Crown. The indigenous heritage of Mexico was something that Spain could not claim. This proved to be one of the sad ironies of Mexican history, however, since national claims to past indigenous greatness generally coexisted with disdain that many Mexicans with European ancestry had for living communities of *indios*.

* * *

As these examples show, the ways in which human beings have identified themselves collectively and distinguished themselves from others are almost infinitely diverse. These cases constitute a tiny selection of possible examples. But it is safe to assume that to include a greater number of cases would only increase the evident variety, rather than reduce it.

It is not uncommon for people to place their own group at the center of the universe as they conceive it, or to confer on themselves a special validity or superior qualities as a basis for differentiating themselves from others. This does not necessarily involve rampant ethnocentrism or hostility toward other populations, however. And when such hostility does exist, it seems as just likely to arise among similar groups in competition for resources as it is between groups who differ in their ways of life. The popular idea that difference in itself automatically provokes hostility does not hold up well in the light of the historical and ethnographic evidence.

As we have seen in the cases of the Kainantu and others, a sense of one's own group's special qualities can also accommodate a recognition that other groups have their own distinct and perhaps equally valid identities. It is also clear that a sense of inherent, immutable difference among peoples is far

from universal. We find few indigenous analogies to Western ideas of biological “race” in this ethnographic array. The closest resemblance, perhaps, is in concepts of different creations. The Tapirapé belief that various neighboring groups are descended from wood ticks or water serpents implies a deep, qualitative difference that might call into question their common humanity. But far more frequent are distinctions that emphasize locality, language, special histories, or other attributes that ultimately, are acquired—either intentionally, or involuntarily, as a result of circumstance—rather than inherent in anything resembling a biological sense.

The next chapter will explore how such an idea developed and came to be a part of conventional wisdom and “common sense.”

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CHAPTER 4

How Did It Start?

Of the many criteria people have used to distinguish themselves from others, pigmentation, hair form, or nose shape have rarely been important. How did those ideas become so significant in European and American thinking? To get to the root of these peculiar criteria, it may be worth reflecting a bit on difference between the inception of ideas—how they arise in the first place—and the processes through which they become established within cultural belief systems.

Certainly, it is far more difficult to trace the birth of an idea than it is to follow the ways in which such an idea develops, changes, and generates various consequences once it becomes part of the repertoire of a cultural system. Yet, like genetic mutation, the inception of ideas is a fundamental part of the total phenomenon of change. We can rarely, if ever, determine how and when a particular genetic mutation has occurred, but we do have some ideas about the ways in which mutations occur in general. And just as mutation has been an important aspect of our understanding of genetic change, the ways in which ideas arise warrant some consideration.

Regarding the specific idea of “race,” it is indisputable that all humans differ physically in innumerable respects, and that no two individuals are fully identical. The possible bases for differentiation, therefore, potentially equal the number of individuals in the population of the world. Humans reduce this complexity to relative simplicity by grouping the range of diversity into inclusive categories based on select criteria. But given the range of possibilities, the choice of certain criteria rather than others raises important questions. “Reality” does not dictate these choices. Social categories are not inevitable responses to “nature.” They are *impositions* on reality that *became* aspects of reality themselves. Perhaps the most fundamental question we can ask, then, is how ideas about human categories arise.

The process through which ideas arise lies at the foundation of most of the important and unique aspects of humanness. Once ideas occur, they can spread beyond the minds of their originators, taking on lives of their

own within and throughout cultural systems. In such cases, they assume an existence far beyond the lives of their originators.

In contrast, even if we were to stipulate that chimpanzees or any other non-human species have ideas, they lack the means of communicating them. They cannot share any complex, abstract concepts except at the simplest level, because they have never developed language. It may be possible for one chimp to communicate a simple thought to other chimps through physical demonstrations such as hopping, grimacing, arm waving, or whatever; but any notion that a chimp cannot convey through immediate demonstration can only remain trapped within the mind of the animal. Chimpanzee ideas cannot, in that sense, have "a life of their own." Only humans, with language, could have developed the idea of "race."

Ideas and "Reality"

This question of how ideas originate is so difficult that it might seem absurd even to pose it. We can rarely know for sure how most specific ideas originated, but we can explore some of the contexts in which ideas arise.

We need to keep in mind that ideas do not spring automatically or inevitably from "the real world." As Edward Sapir observed many decades ago, people with different cultures and languages live in different realities, not merely the same reality with different labels attached.¹ The universe does not present itself to humans already organized in any obvious way. *We* organize it in a fashion that allows us to deal with it in terms of the categories we impose on it. Even if we were ethnocentric enough to assume that our own view of things is the correct and accurate depiction of "true" reality, we would need to confront the implication that all of the thousands of other ways in which different people, including our own ancestors, have perceived reality must assuredly be incorrect, because they disagree. If any one of them is right, then all of the others must be wrong—unless, of course, we prefer to set aside the logical assumption that multiple contradictory postulates cannot be equally valid at the same time. Even if we sought comfort in considering ourselves to be the sole possessors of accuracy, then, we would still be left to account for how all of those other, "incorrect" concepts arose.

In the years following Sapir's work, many scholars and thinkers—particularly those espousing some version of post-structuralism or postmodernism—have gone much further in challenging the validity of perception.² Many scholars have argued that sense impressions are illusions, asserting that our preexisting assumptions, however unconscious, inevitably frame and distort what we perceive. We can return to this point later. For the present, though, we can agree that although preexisting cultural premises

constrain and shape ideas, “reality” does not necessarily do so. We can agree that all humans share the same physical universe, but the universe has not dictated a uniform understanding of itself. “Nature” has permitted the human mind to create understandings of reality that diverge wildly from one another. Once ideas do arise, of course, they often disappear without a trace. Many ideas are ephemeral and never go beyond the minds of anonymous individuals. A few of these flickering flashes of insight, however, spread and become part of the shared wisdom or beliefs of a given population.

Differentiation, Distinctions, and Contrasts in Human Thought

Some thinkers have suggested that the tendency to organize phenomena into categories is a universal human characteristic. That assumption is untested and possibly untestable—debatable, at the very least. But surely at least as fundamental a human trait is the tendency to *draw distinctions*. The ability to see *differences* (or perhaps, to *manufacture* distinctions) between and among phenomena is an essential aspect of the social order. It has been the basis of oppression and injustice, but it has also allowed humans to cope with a chaotic universe. The ability to make distinctions and discern contrasts is probably as intrinsic a part of human evolution as the opposable thumb.

Linguistics offers a useful model for thinking about the arbitrary assignment of meaning and the use of contrasts. As Ferdinand de Saussure and other structural linguists have pointed out, in language the sound of a word and what it means have no intrinsic relationship.³ The relationship between a signifier and what it signifies is arbitrary. Once this relationship is agreed upon, however, the meaning becomes established as a shared pattern, and hence difficult to change. Language imposes meaning on what we might think of as “raw nature.”

As a system, language depends on distinctions between sounds. A sound is significant only insofar as it contrasts with other sounds. Roman Jakobson formalized this observation with the idea of phonetic “distinctive features,” which he expressed in binary terms of “plus” or “minus.” A sound either is bilabial (+), or it is not (−). It is fricative (+) or not (−).⁴ A crucial insight here is that while language operates within the real world of daily life, language has no direct or fixed relationship to concrete reality. To a great extent, language’s field of reference is *internal* to the structure of language itself. Language’s relationship to “reality,” then, is arbitrary, except to the extent that possible sounds are limited by the capabilities of the human vocal apparatus and language’s content is subject to the capacities of the human mind.

We can apply these general insights when we consider the ways in which humans define differences among themselves. The cultural meanings of

social categories rest largely on contrasts. As in language, where the meanings attached to signifiers are arbitrary or imposed on reality, particular *social* distinctions are *impositions* on physical reality rather than *reflections* of it. Once in place, however, they *affect* social reality and tend to perpetuate themselves through feedback. Although the significance of social and cultural categories rests on contrasts, the *contents* of these contrasting categories, as we saw in the last chapter—the criteria that set them apart—vary widely across cultures.

Linguistic communication is, of course, the primary medium for establishing and perpetuating criteria to differentiate humans within cultural systems, although graphic depictions can also play a role. Once established, conceptual categories can be stable and difficult to eradicate, even when many individuals within a given social system fervently wish to do so. As we know, challenges to racial and ethnic stereotypes have rarely succeeded in ridding us of them. We have seen strenuous and heroic measures to combat racism and sexism and the difficulties these efforts have encountered. (We will discuss these issues more fully in succeeding sections.) But these difficulties do not mean that established social and cultural patterns are impervious to "reality." They become, in fact, a *part* of social reality, affecting and being affected by the rest of it.

The Persistence of Pattern

Logically, we could assume that behavioral patterns cannot persist for long among living systems if they are critically maladaptive or confer some serious disadvantage on the continuance of populations, even though many may be detrimental without being lethal in the short term. This is comparable to natural selection in the context of biology. We can suppose that a similar principle applies in the human conceptual realm. Serious disharmonies or internal incompatibilities within a social system can cause disruption that is liable, eventually, to result either in adaptive change or social disintegration. On the other hand, we know that humans have developed practices that do ultimately turn out to be harmful but offer some trade-off in short-term gratification.

Yet patterns do change. Perceptions of problems and contradictions can have consequences in behavior. Although we live within social and cultural milieux that shape our behavior through perceived options, rules, and habits, we are not automatons. In many instances, people have collectively and consciously changed their ways of doing things because the old ways no longer work as well under altered circumstances, and they seek preferable alternatives. Perhaps more commonly, small adjustments in ways of doing

things have unforeseen repercussions that result in changes beyond people's intentions.

Idealist vs. Materialist Models

Whatever the *origins* of ideas, therefore, their *persistence* requires at least some compatibility with peoples' needs and desires, although the perpetuation of ideas may often be associated with power disparities. In oppressive social systems, for example, ideas that harm a majority may well pay off for one or another constituency with a vested interest in their persistence. This is no less true of concepts about human differences than it is of any other ideas.

Operationally, such cognitive patterns, or ways of looking at things, involve systemic relationships of feedback precisely *because* views of reality are likely to have repercussions on the people who maintain them. Social and cultural epiphenomena, the unintended consequences of such patterns regardless of their origins, have much to do with whether these patterns become established aspects of a given cultural system or merely amount to transitory aberrations. This interface—the interplay between concepts of differentiation and the details of human existence in time and place—is the juncture we can most easily observe and examine. What happens as a result of the beliefs people hold? How do these ideas affect actions, and what are the repercussions of such behavior, whether intended or not? How do beliefs persist in the face of events?

Perceptions of human difference involve an interplay between the conceptual realm of culture and material, “on-the-ground” aspects of human life. For that reason, the study of human differentiation requires a theoretical approach that draws insights from perspectives that some writers have referred to as “idealist” and “materialist” models.

In the history of anthropological thinking, these approaches have often been placed in opposition. “Idealist” approaches focus on the mental aspects of culture and stress the interpretation of meaning.⁵ They have offered rich insights into particular cultural ways of constructing reality. But idealist approaches have tended to be highly specific in their scope, focusing intensely on unique aspects of particular cultures. As a result, a criticism of idealist approaches has been that they fail to produce results that lend themselves to scientific comparison or generalization beyond the specific case.

Materialist approaches, which rest largely on observable and measurable phenomena, offer far more potential for scientific general statements.⁶ On the other hand, materialist approaches are not particularly useful if we want to address the realm of indigenous belief and knowledge, which many of us consider to be the most interesting aspects of the human experience.

To explore the issue of perceptions of human difference, neither approach is sufficient by itself. The cognitive realm, the realm of ideas, is a central aspect of this problem. But to understand why particular ideas have become established and persisted, we need to compare multiple cases and explore the relationships between these cognitive patterns and material aspects of life, including the nature of particular interest groups. We need, in other words, to look at the issue of *adaptedness*.

Adaptedness

As we have noted, it seems self-evident that to persist, any cultural pattern must be at least minimally adaptive. Adaptation in itself, however, does not imply any positive value in a moral or ethical sense. To be "adaptive" does not mean to be morally "good," regardless of what we happen to mean by morality or goodness. A parasite that adapts to its host is not necessarily a good thing, at least for the host. Marx and Engels, in the nineteenth century, pointed out numerous examples of mutually adapted social patterns that perpetuated exploitation and injustice.⁷ The dominant ideology of a given social system might disguise the structure of exploitive relationships, with the effect of perpetuating them. A prevailing religious doctrine that emphasizes humility and hard work might underwrite exploitation of the poor. Adaptation means only that for a society to maintain a pattern of behavior, such behavior must be sufficiently compatible with the broader context to allow the survival of the social system, at least in the short term. In that vein, racism has persisted—notwithstanding its destructive nature—partly because it has become adapted to a larger system of relationships and has been congenial to a variety of powerful interests.

The basic idea of adaptedness does not take us very far in addressing the full diversity of adaptation's specific results and consequences. Such a task would require examination of a wide variety of ethnographic cases in an attempt to identify aspects of human life that have cultivated, tolerated, or inhibited specific patterns in the contexts of particular cultures and societies. We can, however, note a few examples. We might recall the classic case of the Mbuti of the Zaire rainforest, who hunted and traded meat and hides with neighboring agricultural villagers for iron tools and other goods they could not produce themselves.⁸ This relationship was beneficial to both sides, since each exploited an ecological niche that the other did not. They had something to offer one another. Each of these populations also considered themselves superior to the other, and their ethnocentrism apparently helped to maintain each group's boundaries and to keep the populations relatively distinct. In this case, each group's perception of the other—however

negative—was “adaptive” in the sense that it was compatible with the maintenance of their complementary relationship.

We might also consider the complex issue of male–female relationships in a variety of cultural contexts. In her pioneering cross-cultural study, Peggy Sanday demonstrated that the status of women compared to that of men in many societies shows a strong correlation with the degree to which women contribute to subsistence.⁹ Presumably, no one would argue that in societies where men control the bulk of subsistence, an oppressed status for women is a “good” thing. Such factors are a part of a broad field of mutual influence and structured systems of meaning, and in that sense they are *compatible*. Each is “adapted” to the other. It would be absurd to argue that whatever happens to be compatible with some existing constellation of relationships is necessarily conducive to the well-being of a social system, or that it enhances the quality of life for the people involved, however one might assess such a thing. It is enough to note that such relationships work to perpetuate the status quo. Racial and other discriminatory categories usually confer advantages on those who do the defining, despite their injustices, and may be tenacious and resilient.

As we will discuss, institutionalized categories associated with discriminatory advantages and disadvantages are especially common in state systems. As Nikos Poulantzas and other political scientists have pointed out, state systems exist at the nexus of competing interest groups.¹⁰ In the process of colonial expansion, indigenous populations who once were autonomous have often found themselves incorporated into states and, in that context, have *become* interest groups within the competitive arena of the state, whether they wish to be or not.¹¹ Inevitably, in such a situation, they have faced vastly more powerful interests who generally mean them no good, especially when it comes to control over their resources. The dynamics of this model apply more generally to a wide range of discriminatory categories through which powerful interests have the power to define boundaries and ascribe—as well as describe—social categories to their own advantage.

Racist assumptions about the inferiority of Africans in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States were compatible with the slave trade and the plantation system of the antebellum American South. The caste system of India, with all of the injustices it has perpetuated over the millennia, has been “adaptive” in the sense that it has been compatible with other features within its social, cultural, and political context.

On the other hand, even though such developments as caste and “racial” categories tend to be persistent—especially if the factors that gave rise to them continue to support them—perceptions sometimes do change. We need only recall the hatred many Americans felt toward Germans during

World War I and contrast it with contemporary attitudes toward Germany. The extreme racist stereotypes depicting Japanese during the 1940s, compared with contemporary American images of Japan and the Japanese, offer another example. It is no surprise that war or the threat of war is conducive to negative perceptions of the enemy. More significant, however, is the historical fact that such negative images, whatever their causes, are not necessarily permanent. In some cases, changing economic and political situations have coincided with modified perceptions.

The Roots of "Race"

Racism, like any other pattern of collective attitudes toward different categories of people, has a specific history and originated in a particular sociocultural context. Unlike social patterns in many cultural systems, however, the history of racism is documented, allowing us to perceive some of the processes through which it developed. Contemporary North American views and conceptions of "race" clearly have their historic roots in Europe and, as we shall discuss, flourished in the English colonies in North America.

The origins of racism are of interest in themselves. But it is also clear that the phenomenon has undergone numerous transformations, most of them responses and adaptations to the circumstances of time and place. In recent times few, if any, European populations have been entirely free of racism in some form, but specific ideas and behaviors regarding "race" have varied widely through the past several centuries.

Spain, as one example, oversaw the destruction of many indigenous populations in the Americas. Much of this devastation resulted from the inadvertent spread of disease, although harsh treatment, forced labor, and the dislocation of local populations contributed in a major way to the outcome. Yet Spanish policies in the sixteenth century also encouraged intermarriage between Spanish and indigenous peoples in Mexico and elsewhere. No doubt many of these relationships were exploitive, but not necessarily all. The result, in any case, was the production of a large population with combined indigenous and Spanish heritage.

In contrast, English policies in North America, Africa, and elsewhere involved far more stringent social barriers. The subsequent history of rigid "racial" exclusion and segregation in the United States had deep roots in earlier English patterns that intensified and took on new aspects in North America.

As we noted in Chapter 3, ethnocentrism, an assumption of the superiority of one's own group, may be universal. But full-blown modern racism rests on the idea of intrinsic *biological* differences between populations and condemns some of them to permanent, fixed, inherent inferiority. How did

commonplace ethnocentrism evolve to become racism? Reference to “race” is extremely rare in European writing before the sixteenth century, and the meaning of the term changed during the next several hundred years. As we have noted, “race” in its archaic sense carried the sense of a moving stream; and when applied to human affairs, it generally referred to a lineage or to hereditary relationships, as in the sense of transmitted rights or elite status. In the course of the next several centuries, however, a number of developments had far-reaching repercussions that among other things, altered this archaic version of “race.” One was the European exploration of other parts of the world and attendant encounters with other populations who up to that point had been unfamiliar, or even unknown.

This is not to say that Europe had been entirely isolated before that time. Even in the fourth century B.C.E., as we have seen, the Greek historian Herodotus had described the ways of people from Egypt to the steppes of Asia.¹² Europe had later undergone numerous invasions by people from the Asian plains. Genghis Khan with his “Golden Horde” and Attila the Hun had not only had terrorized Eastern Europe, but had left offspring there. The Crusades, beginning in the eleventh century, brought Europeans to the eastern Mediterranean region, and Marco Polo’s (1254–1324) lengthy stay in the employ of Kublai Khan gave him an intimate exposure to the workings of the Mongol court. The Polo brothers’ journey to China in the thirteenth century also helped to increase trade with the Far East. But for most Europeans, faraway lands were sources of wonder, fantasy, and even horror.

As European powers extended ocean travel in search of resources and trade opportunities, however, they experienced much more first-hand contact with peoples in what for them, were exotic places. For the first time in history, Europeans made concerted efforts to establish lasting contact with the rest of the world—and to claim possession of much of it. The Spanish and Portuguese reached North and South America at the end of the fifteenth century and soon sailed around Cape Horn to the South Pacific. Almost six hundred years after Scandinavians reached what is now the Atlantic Coast of Canada, Columbus learned of the existence of North America in an unsuccessful attempt to find a sea route to India. In the sixteenth century, the Dutch made contact with Native Americans along the Atlantic Coast, and the French established relationships with native peoples farther north on the St. Lawrence River.

Within the same generation, the English carried out a concerted invasion of the Celtic tribal lands of the British Isles. The Dutch established a foothold in Java and other Indonesian islands. And in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese made some of the first expeditions to West Africa, trading for slaves to work on plantations in Brazil. These events and the processes they

set in motion produced a need to conceptualize the nature of these foreign inhabitants and to explain how they might relate to people closer to home. Precedents for these considerations, of course, lay in longstanding ideas about differences in human qualities.

Social class had long been a part of state systems, and the idea of social difference had played a major role throughout Europe even before Roman times. But in other ways, the intellectual climate in sixteenth-century England and France developed in different directions from the predominant ideas in Spain, Portugal, and the Italian city-states. All of these European monarchies were powerful players the age of exploration, but one difference among them was the extent to which ideas associated with the Enlightenment affected people's perceptions of the world.

The Enlightenment and Secularism

Among the constellation of ideas we associate with the Enlightenment, or the "Age of Reason," was a strong tendency toward secularism, a departure from the theological explanation that had dominated thought in Europe for many centuries. The Enlightenment drew great impetus from the Protestant Reformation, which took emphatic and, as it turned out, violent departure from the established Roman Catholic Church. This departure occurred most strongly in Northern Europe.

Although Protestants were no less adamant in their belief in God, they argued that the worshiper had little need for an intermediary priesthood to interpret the Gospel. The Protestant movement gained much impetus from the printing of the Bible in the vernacular, which made sacred texts accessible to a far broader readership. The departure from humble acquiescence in the face of hierarchical church authority toward a more personal relationship with God helped to legitimize the use of individual judgment to seek the "truth." This era saw an increased pursuit of empirical science, with greater skepticism of supernatural or mystical causation. Underlying all of this, implicitly, was a faith in the power of rational thought.

Although the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s weakened the power of the Roman Catholic Church in northern Europe, Catholic Church doctrine in the Mediterranean region retained greater intellectual and legal dominance.¹³ In Spain, sixteenth-century scholars debated the nature of the recently discovered Native Americans and argued over appropriate policies for dealing with them. The debates of the "School of Salamanca" occurred largely within a theological framework.¹⁴ Did Native Americans have souls? Were they descended from Adam and Eve, or were they the offspring of a

different creation? Was it permissible to use them as slaves for brute labor, or was it a Christian duty to convert them to the true faith? Did Native Americans' ignorance of Christ condemn them, or should they be given the opportunity to save their souls through education?

In general, the issues were moral rather than scientific, if we use the term "science" in the modern sense.¹⁵ The scholars of Salamanca followed the reasoning of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and, ultimately, of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E), to develop an idea of what the appropriate stance toward this populace should be. In the end, scholars such as the priest Bartolomeo de Las Casas persuaded the Spanish Crown that Native Americans were indeed humans with souls, and that it was not acceptable to enslave or otherwise mistreat them. That decision in Spain, however, proved all but impossible to enforce across the Atlantic.

In England and France, questions about indigenous peoples differed from those of the Spanish debates in their emphasis. Discussions about whether Native Americans had descended from Adam and Eve did persist into the nineteenth century, and the origins of Africans stirred debate from that time onward; but in Northern Europe, much of the early discussion dwelt on other aspects of this newly discovered North American population. What accounted for the color of their skin? Was the environment involved? What were the reasons for their manner of living, their supposed temperament, and so on? Many of the hypotheses that arose regarding these issues sound rather bizarre in the twenty-first century, but the mode of inquiry and the curiosity behind it had more to do with the early development of the natural sciences than it did with theology.

Although most of these speculations focused on issues that were fundamentally empirical, the discussions suffered from a dearth of objective evidence. Few Europeans had ever visited North America or seen a Native American, and even fewer had spoken to one. Tales from the colonies often conveyed information that was either distorted or entirely fabricated. Most colonists who actually lived in the New World were not particularly sympathetic to the indigenous inhabitants. And in general, their reports offered as much fantasy as scientific data. Even the seasoned traveler Sir Walter Raleigh claimed to have seen people with eyes in the middle of their chests. These queries did, nonetheless, serve as foundations for later, more objective empirical studies based on better information.

Aspirations of objectivity in these early inquiries did not necessarily lead to humane policies. As we shall see, some of the most extreme racism in the United States arose in a "scientific" framework during the nineteenth century. Yet, for some scholars, such as John Locke in England and Michel de Montaigne in France, Native Americans inspired some degree of cultural

relativism. Locke argued that differences among humans were the result of differing experience rather than inherent, fixed qualities.

Whether there be any such moral principles, wherein all men do agree, I appeal to any who has been but moderately conversant in the history of mankind and looked abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys. Where is that practical truth that is universally received without doubt or question, as it must be if innate?¹⁶

Locke's idea of the human mind as an "empty cabinet" waiting to be filled by experience would have been inconsistent with any argument that human differences were either profound or intrinsic.

The example of Native Americans also served as a literary foil for writers to critique their own societies. These fancied "children of nature" became exemplars of innocence, with freedom from a range of vices that allegedly beset more "civilized" Europeans of the time. But when we examine the treatment of Native Americans and other non-European populations at the hands of colonial powers, northern Europeans, especially English, demonstrated little of what we might today consider enlightened policies. Locke himself held a position of authority in the West Indies, where the economy rested on slave labor.

Spanish Colonialism in North America

We noted earlier that the Spanish conquests in the Americas resulted in the deaths of millions of native peoples in the Americas.¹⁷ Most of these deaths were the unintended results of diseases that were previously unknown in these parts of the world; but conscription for labor in mines and other enterprises and policies of *reduccion*, which removed indigenous people from large parts of the countryside to concentrate them in administered communities, took a major toll. Yet the Spanish *did* encourage intermarriage with indigenous peoples—in almost all cases, Spanish men with indigenous women—with the explicit intention of blending the indigenous population with the Spanish.¹⁸ To some extent this was a matter of practicality. During the early years of Spanish presence in North and South America, Spaniards constituted small minorities, despite their firm grip on power, and most of the colonists were male. Their Spanish wives, if they had them, remained at home.

No doubt many of these conjugal relationships in the New World were exploitive and nonreciprocal; but this situation was also characteristic of many marriages in Europe at the time. Many resulted in Spanish-indigenous

marriages that the church sanctioned as stable unions. Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, had a son by a native woman and named him Martín. Cortes also had a son by his wife in Spain named Martín.¹⁹ It is tempting to see this as the symbolic beginning of a major social division in Mexico between people with shared Spanish and indigenous parentage, who became known as *mestizo*, and “pure” Spaniards born in Spain, or *peninsulares*. To be sure, the term “mestizo,” which means “mixed,” expresses the concept that two distinct populations existed in the first place. But the mixing in that era seems to have caused little or no consternation among the Spanish elites.

Decades later, as more Spanish women arrived in Mexico, they became a de facto interest group (although it is not clear that they perceived themselves as such). It appears that an incipient Mexican form of class, based on Spanish roots, began to develop. Peninsulares, Spaniards born in Spain, increasingly tended to look down on *criollos*, those of Spanish descent born in Mexico, and to an even greater extent, on mestizos.

Again, these differences seem to have been more a matter of evolving class distinctions than racism in the modern sense. As Hugo Nutini notes of the term “mestizo,”

Around the end of the seventeenth century the term acquired the entire range of social and cultural connotation it has today; a mixture of Indian and European, various degrees of admixture of Indian and European, and phenotypic Indians who have acquired Mestizo status.²⁰

But Spanish concepts in that era do not appear to have involved deeply held ideas of “racial” incompatibility or of intrinsic, insurmountable human differences. Nutini writes that

Although there were black slaves throughout the viceroyalty until the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the late seventeenth century they had been largely absorbed into the Indian and Mestizo population and ceased to be a distinct ethnic group.²¹

Spanish policies were far from egalitarian, but they do not appear to have drawn much energy from the idea of biological difference. The salient issues, if anything, were Spanish cultural heritage, social class, and adherence to Christianity.

Class differences had a long history in indigenous Mexico before the Spanish arrived. In Mexico the Spanish took over preexisting stratified social systems with ancient roots and installed themselves as a new elite at the top of the hierarchy. By the nineteenth century, peninsulares considered themselves

superior to criollos, people who might have been entirely of Spanish descent, but had been born in Mexico. Criollos, in turn, felt superior to mestizos. All felt superior to *indios*, those identified as indigenous people.

The distinctions among these categories, and especially between indios and mestizos, were often more a matter of language and culture than biology. An individual would be indio if he spoke an indigenous language and wore distinctive local clothing, particularly if he lived in an indigenous community. If the same person spoke Spanish and dressed like the rest of the general population, he was generally considered mestizo. A person might also move from one status to another.

With regard to indios, according to Nutini,

... by the middle of the seventeenth century, the term had become a cultural category; meaning those who practiced an Indian culture. The definition of an Indian since this early period has remained essentially cultural. Given the continuous passing from Indian to non-Indian society for four centuries, the genetic differences today between Indians and Mestizos (whether in rural communities or in the populations of most towns and cities) are insignificant.²²

French Colonization of North America

French exploration and settlement in North America offers some interesting comparisons and contrasts with the Spanish experience. In both cases, contact involved mostly males on the European side. Both colonial regimes supported extensive missionary activity. And in both cases, authorities encouraged intermarriage with indigenous people. With regard to French explorations along the St. Lawrence River, however, the experience differed considerably from that of the Spanish in Mexico and South America. The Spanish encountered indigenous state systems with large, dense populations and achieved conquest within a few years, with vast destruction of indigenous societies and people. The French, however, encountered far smaller populations of village-dwelling Iroquoian and Algonkian-speaking peoples who, for the most part, remained relatively independent and in control of their own affairs for many generations after contact.

Some of the reasons for this lay with the motivations of each European power. The Spanish sought precious metals and labor for mining and agriculture. Their determination to spread Christianity also played an important role, at least for some factions among them. At home, the Spanish had recently (1492) driven out Muslims and Jews who for centuries had been a rich part of the fabric of their society. The Inquisition was gaining power.

Tolerance for other religious beliefs and practices, especially indigenous beliefs alien to Christianity, was hardly a possibility.

It was during the expulsion of Moors and Jews in the late fifteenth century that we begin to see some incipient flickerings of what eventually would become full-blown racism. It arose as a reaction to some Spanish Jews and Moors who converted to Christianity. Many of them, no doubt, chose conversion as a means of retaining their property, some of which they had held over many generations. Some Spanish challenged the status of these converts as “true” Christians by referring to their “blood.” *Limpieza de sangre*—“purity of blood”—became an intrinsic criterion for legitimate status.

The French sent missionaries to work among indigenous peoples of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes region, but the French Court did not have close collaborative ties with the church hierarchy comparable to those of the Spanish Crown. French relationships with the native peoples of the St. Lawrence area, moreover, depended on reciprocal trade, economic agreements, and alliances. The French were in no position to impose their will, religious or otherwise, on the people of the region.

French Jesuit missionaries who worked among the Huron in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced some invaluable accounts of life in these communities. Their records, “The Jesuit Relations,”²³ also reveal the amused tolerance the local indigenous people displayed toward the missionaries. The Hurons made it clear that they were not particularly impressed with the relatively short, hairy foreigners whose odor, in keeping with European standards of hygiene at the time, offended Huron sensibilities. In at least one instance, as missionaries endeavored to learn the Huron language, their informants deliberately taught them obscene phrases, laughing uproariously when the missionaries unwittingly tried them out in the community.²⁴

The economic basis of French interaction with peoples in the St. Lawrence region was the fur trade, rather than the search for precious metals and indigenous labor. Like England and Spain, France was an agrarian society; but unlike England in particular, France was not overcrowded or short of arable land. The regions north of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes were marginal for farming in any case, especially given the technology and status of agriculture at the time. The growing season was short, the soil was thin and acidic, and the Canadian Shield comprised a vast region that the last glacial advance had scraped to bedrock in many areas. Furs, on the other hand, had become an increasingly prized international commodity. They had become especially valuable in Europe since the Swedes captured a key port on the Baltic Sea and cut off the supply of imported furs from Russia. The loss of Siberian furs for Western European markets occurred at a time when demand for them was high, and the potential profits were

great. North America offered a rich alternative source of furs, particularly beaver, which Europeans used to manufacture hats.

Acquiring these furs in North America required good working relationships with the indigenous people. Their conquest or displacement would have been counterproductive. Local hunters were far more skillful at trapping beaver and far more knowledgeable about the countryside than any outsiders could be, and when native peoples acquired metal traps, knives, and other useful items through trade, their capacity and willingness to bring in beaver pelts increased. For the French, the ideal relationship was to trade for furs, which were valuable to Europeans but of little interest to indigenous people, in exchange for tools and other goods the native trappers valued.²⁵ As a result, native peoples remained in possession of most of their territories for centuries—in some cases, to the present. In a vast region on the eastern side of James Bay south of Hudson's Bay, the first serious threats to native autonomy occurred in the 1970s, when the Province of Quebec built the La Grande hydroelectric project.²⁶

For the French in the 1500s, the major adversaries in North America were not native peoples but other Europeans—particularly the English and *their* native allies in the colonies to the south. Relationships among all of these groups had more to do with political and economic interests than they did with "race." This does not imply that French relationships with local indigenous peoples were without problems and occasional conflicts. But the early history of these interactions offers little or no support for any assumption that simple cultural difference or a lack of recent common history is bound to produce animosity. As we know, such differences often mean that each party has something to offer the other, especially if gross power disparities are not involved. Indeed, some of the earliest conflicts the French had with Native Americans arose when the French became involved in a fight between their Algonkian allies and the Algonkians' longstanding Iroquoian enemies, probably Mohawks.²⁷

English Colonies in North America

English relations with indigenous peoples in North America had a different tone from the outset. Certainly the British authorities did attempt to form and maintain alliances with indigenous peoples on many occasions, often for trade and, perhaps more importantly, for military alliances. But the nature of English economic motivations, and the general history of their dealings with the tribal peoples of Scotland and Ireland, set things on a different course in the regions between the St. Lawrence River and the South Atlantic Coast.

Audrey Smedley argues that during the realm of Queen Elizabeth I, before any major English colonization in North America, the Irish tribes had become the prototypical “savages” in the English popular mind.²⁸

The last of the sixteenth-century rebellions, in 1579, which brought both the wealth of Elizabeth and the triumph of her forces over the Irish chieftain Hugh O’Neill, was the climax of four centuries of repeated invasions, implacable Irish resistance, and failed attempts to consolidate English power over the western island.²⁹

English forces had invaded Ireland from 1169 to 1171 in the reign of Henry II, soon after the Norman invasion of England. To the consternation of the authorities, however, some of the early English settlers mingled too closely with the natives. In an attempt to counter this alarming tendency, the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1367 forbade English to “wear Irish dress or hairstyles, to speak the Irish language, or to intermarry or trade with the Irish.”³⁰

By the Elizabethan period in the late sixteenth century, relationships had only worsened, and the English view of Irish as subhuman beings had intensified. In the following reign of King James I, one Barnabe Rich opined in 1610 that

The Irish had rather still retain themselves in their sluttishness, in their uncleanness, in their rudeness, and in their inhuman loathsomeness, than they would take any example from the English, either of civility, humanity, or any manner of decency.³¹

Many English forces thought little of killing Irish women and children along with men, in what appears to have been at least an informal policy of genocide.³² By the late seventeenth century

What did increase in English theories and images of the Irish was the belief that many Irish were incapable of being civilized, that the “wild” Irish, those who most vigorously resisted English hegemony, would remain untamed, and that the only way to bring them under some form of civilized control was to enslave them.³³

Many of the same military officers who had razed Irish communities also fought indigenous peoples in the North American colonies.³⁴

In some ways, the English incentives for colonizing North America were more complex than those of the French and Spanish. The enclosure movement in England drove people from the countryside into crowded cities, where unemployment led to increasing poverty and crime. Not only was

farmland increasingly precious, but extensive deforestation had created a growing need for wood. Fuel became scarce, and timber for construction and even for the masts of ships made the forests of North America a critical resource.³⁵

The English also competed with the Dutch for international markets and other resources. Like the French, the Dutch and English sought furs, and the Dutch presence on the mid-Atlantic Coast in the sixteenth century, including fur traders who mingled closely with the natives and even married some of them, became an increasingly competitive annoyance for the English to the north and south of them. The English also sought cod from the North Atlantic waters, and they soon developed tobacco and sugar plantations on the Carolina Coast and the West Indies—another arena of competition among European powers. As we shall discuss, tobacco and sugar enterprises became major reasons for the introduction of slavery.

Perhaps one of the most important ways in which the English colonial experience differed from that of the French and Spanish, however, was in the nature of the immigrants themselves. The earliest French and Spanish arrivals in North America were men who sought wealth, adventure, or a chance to enhance their social status through a combination of both. This was also true of some English arrivals, but far more of them came to settle, arriving with their families. The English had far less incentive, therefore, to establish relationships with local populations through intermarriage. Rather than seeking common ground with indigenous peoples, they sought their lands. In that sense, the early English colonists established a pattern that continued for centuries, even after Native peoples had lost most of their territories.

The scarcity of farmland in England had created a displaced, surplus urban population who were becoming increasingly troublesome. North American colonies offered a safety valve for those at the bottom of the scale, as well as for the elites. The colonies offered a chance for many of those at the lower end to have the farms they could never have had in England, and perhaps even some hope for a degree of prosperity. For the elites, who generally had no particular yearning to farm a plot of land with their own hands, it was an opportunity to rid England of undesirables. Among the latter were convicts whose numbers had not only exceeded the capacities of prisons, but overflowed the hulks of the aging ships at anchor in harbors that served as repositories for the prison surplus. Even the numerous public hangings, for myriad crimes including poaching game or setting fire to haystacks, had proved insufficient to reduce the problem.³⁶

The very earliest English settlers to arrive on what would later become known as the Virginia coast encountered a local confederation of Algonkian speakers. These inhabitants, apparently not at first perceiving a serious

threat from the bedraggled refugees who had arrived from some unknown, distant place, allowed them to settle nearby. They even gave the refugees food to get them through hard times—only to be rewarded by disease and, before too long, open conflict. Ultimately, both factors worked to the detriment of all parties concerned.

But the section of the North Atlantic Coast known as New England was the scene of more extended and complex interaction. As all American school-children (should) know, a major contingent of settlers in New England were Puritan refugees from persecution in England. Having suffered assaults because of their beliefs, they fled first to the Netherlands for freedom to observe their own religious practices, and then to the shores of North America. In general, however, their commitment to religious freedom did not extend beyond themselves. Like the Spanish of the same century, the Puritans did not give serious consideration to the possible validity of indigenous belief systems or accord them much respect. The idea that religious tolerance should extend to non-Christian indigenous people would not have merited serious consideration.

Even more to the point, as we have noted, the English settlers were less interested in entering into relationships with native peoples than they were in appropriating land for settlement. But at first, indigenous populations vastly outnumbered the European arrivals, and the English saw the wisdom of peaceful coexistence with their hosts. Indeed, as we have seen, English survival initially depended on some assistance from the local people—"the first Thanksgiving" and all that. At the heart of the matter, however, English settlers wanted territory, and the native peoples were in the way.

Puritan ideology also worked to dehumanize Native Americans. Puritans viewed indigenous beliefs with suspicion, even associating them with satanism and witchcraft. They made strenuous efforts to convert native peoples to their brand of Christianity, which went beyond mere doctrine to include the Puritans' legendarily austere way of life. They also saw a need to repress what they saw as inappropriate ways of living among native peoples. These offenses included what they mistakenly perceived as profligate sexuality and extended to "immodest" clothing and long hair. At the same time, some Puritans also harbored fears that some among them were being affected, and perhaps even spiritually contaminated, by the natives. The renowned preacher Increase Mather lamented that "Christians in the land have become too like unto the Indians, and then we need not wonder if the Lord hath afflicted us by them."³⁷

The Puritans did manage to establish a few villages of converts, or "praying Indians," many of them refugees from disrupted and depleted communities that could no longer function. These villages of converts only added to the

growing tensions between Europeans and native peoples. War erupted in 1636 when Puritans under Governor Winthrop used the murder of a trader as a pretext to attack Narragansett and Pequot communities. This conflict, which set off what we now refer to as the Pequot War, eventually resulted in the deaths of many hundreds of people on both sides—a significant level of casualties, considering the small populations of the times. Puritans led by one John Mason attacked an undefended Pequot village and massacred hundreds of people in one of the best-documented atrocities of the war. Cotton Mather (1673–1728), Puritan extraordinaire, claimed that “no less than 600 Pequot souls were brought down to hell that day.”³⁸ In the end, the war resulted in the elimination of the Pequot as a people—by treaty, if not physically. (Centuries later, however, the Pequot-owned Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut is a spectacular testimony to the persistence of Pequot identity.)

A few decades later, Puritans attacked the community of the Wampanoag leader Metacom, whom they knew as “King Philip,” beginning a war that erupted into the bloodiest conflict in the colonies up to that point. The attack produced a concerted attempt by a coalition of native peoples to drive the English back into the sea, and they came close to succeeding. When King Philip’s War ended in 1676, however, most of the Native groups of New England had been devastated and driven from their former territories.³⁹

Plantation Labor

In the southern colonies, the English established not only family farms but also plantations. Small farmers generally strove to be self-sufficient and produce some surplus for extra income or barter. Plantations were more explicitly business enterprises intended to produce commodities for transatlantic commerce. Cotton would later (after the invention of the cotton gin) become the dominant cash crop in the nineteenth century, but the earlier plantations specialized in tobacco and sugar.

Plantations required a labor force far beyond the capacities of even the largest families. Some of these operations, particularly in the West Indies, used convicts, including tens of thousands of Irish, as well as English indentured servants who had contracted to labor for a number of years in order to pay for their passage from England. In the Carolinas and other southern colonies, early plantation owners also used Native Americans as slaves. Generally these were war captives, sold or traded to the Europeans by other Native peoples. This slave trade intensified violent conflicts among native groups in the interior, even at a distance from the coastal plantations. Native American slaves proved to be unacceptably troublesome, however, prone either to escape or to die easily. Yet the precedent of slave labor had

become well established, and by the mid-1600s, African slaves—whom the Portuguese already used extensively in Brazil—became the basis of plantation labor in North America.

Class hierarchy was a part of life, both in England and later in the British colonies, well before the establishment of slavery. More rigid social barriers grew and strengthened between English and Irish, Native Americans, and Africans. In a sense, we might see this as an extreme elaboration on a much older, established pattern. It was in this context that American racism evolved.

In New England, religious ideology offered a rationale for the dehumanization of Native Americans, but English attitudes toward native peoples also involved some ambivalence. Several colonies passed laws that prohibited colonists from “running off to join the Indians,” which implies that some of the authorities, at least, perceived that such measures were necessary—just as they had felt the need to pass the Statutes of Kilkenny centuries earlier, banning English fraternization with the Irish. Jill LePore notes that “in both New England and Ireland, not a few colonists, after all, had run off to live with the natives, abandoning English society altogether.”⁴⁰ At a later period, a literary genre on the theme of “Indian captivity,” usually focusing on captive “white” women, fascinated and titillated generations of readers. Typically, of course, popular literature portrayed the native captors as rapacious savages.

On the other hand, Native Americans sometimes did capture and adopt English settlers, especially women and children—often to replenish their communities that had been depleted by disease and warfare.⁴¹ In times of war, grown men were more likely to be combatants and receive harsher treatment. But some adopted captives became full members of native communities and chose to remain with them even after they could have left. In the Genesee Valley of western New York, Mary Jemison married her Seneca captor and remained with him until he died. She bore him several children, some of whose descendants remain part of the modern Seneca communities of Western New York. She remained in their family home in the Genesee River Gorge until her own death at an advanced age.⁴²

In the eighteenth century the French traveler Hector St. Jean Crèvecoeur wrote that children who had been captured by Native Americans during the French and Indian Wars and grew up in those communities often refused to leave when they had the opportunity. He mused about the complex relationships between European and Native peoples.

There must be in their social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted among us; for thousands of Europeans are

Indians, and we have no examples of even one of these Aborigines having from choice become Europeans.⁴³

Numerous individuals transcended the social and cultural boundaries between European and Native American populations. In the eighteenth century, Sir William Johnson married Molly Brant, the sister of the Mohawk leader Joseph Brant (Theyendanegeya), and for much of his life worked to maintain an alliance between the Mohawks and the British.

Other more notorious characters such as Simon Girty moved back and forth between native and English populations. A Delaware war party had captured Simon and his brothers in 1755. They turned him over to a group of Senecas, with whom he lived until 1758, and for much of his life Girty acted as interpreter and negotiator. Apparently hard-drinking, with a volatile temperament, Girty had his enemies. The Moravian missionary John Heckworth characterized him as "as brutal, depraved, and wicked a wretch as ever lived."⁴⁴ Yet the historian Colin Calloway cites his "effectiveness as interpreter and intercultural broker between English-speaking and Indian peoples. For this he may be remembered as noteworthy, not notorious."⁴⁵ In general, however, such cases did little to deter the overwhelming tendency for the English to maintain rigid social boundaries. Indeed, Girty offers an example of one who at times served the purposes of one interest or another, but apparently enjoyed the full trust of none of them.

It would be difficult to assess the relative factors of "racial" identity and personal history in such cases, but little evidence suggests that most Native American peoples categorized Europeans as less than fully human. Certainly, native people must have seen Europeans as curious figures. On first arrival, Europeans often showed incompetence in their new setting, even to the extent of being unable to survive without assistance. As events developed and grievances accumulated, it would have been inevitable that Native Americans should draw negative conclusions about the invaders; yet it seems to have taken some time, in most cases, for something reciprocating European "racial" generalizations to develop. Unfortunately, however, by the twentieth century even Euro-American racism with regard to African Americans and other groups had spread to some Native American communities.

Most evidence, however, indicates that modern American racism had its beginnings in European, and particularly English, history. From all we have discussed up to this point, it is clear that American racism arose from a convergence of numerous factors and events, rather than from any single cause. One precipitating event in the colonies, however—Bacon's Rebellion—seems to have condensed many of the volatile forces and offers a glimpse of a crucial moment in the establishment of racism as an aspect of American life.

Bacon's Rebellion

Much plantation labor was demanding enough to be lethal, ultimately, for those who performed it. At the same time, plantation ownership offered great rewards for the few who could exploit it. As we have seen, the labor to produce plantation wealth came from a variety of sources. Although the use of Native American slaves ultimately proved impractical, in the early plantations, Europeans (usually convicts or indentured servants) constituted a significant proportion of the work force. The first slave ship reached the coast of Virginia in 1619 with a cargo of twenty Africans, and African slaves became a major component of the labor force by the middle of the seventeenth century, although many indentured servants continued to work on plantations alongside slaves.

Indentured servants and African slaves in the seventeenth century had much in common, with the exception of the time limits on the indenture of servants. Technically, indentured servitude was a voluntary position, and usually it terminated after five or seven years. The laws of contract supposedly protected the rights of both servant and master, but power disparities between them made enforcement of the servant's rights far less likely. Masters could sell indentured servants, just as they could slaves. Like slaves, the servants were subject to beatings and rape, both of which were commonplace. Servants could not marry without the permission of their owners, and any children they bore without such permission were illegitimate. The elites typically viewed their indentured servants as dirty, lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy, and generally worthy of disdain.

As more African slaves became part of life in the colonies, they intermingled with indentured servants, often finding common cause. Edward Morgan writes that

There are hints that the two despised groups initially saw each other as sharing the same predicament. It was common, for example, for servants and slaves to run away together, steal hogs together, get drunk together. It was not uncommon for them to make love together.⁴⁶

By the end of the 1600s, slaves, servants, and Native Americans vastly outnumbered plantation-owning families.

A pervasive nightmare among the slaveholding elites, understandably, was the possibility of slave rebellion. Many such rebellions did occur, although none went very far. But perhaps a still greater fear was the possibility that slaves and indentured servants would join forces to overthrow their oppressors. Many of the elites comprehended the danger inherent in a mass of exploited and brutalized people who had little to lose. This awareness

did not produce any major call for reform, however. The response of the elites, instead, was to exert their power all the more rigidly and harshly.

A major eruption finally occurred in 1676, when a force of African slaves, indentured servants, and frontiersmen attacked and burned the Virginia capital of Jamestown. The rebellion failed, eventually, but not before the English Crown sent a thousand troops across the Atlantic to quell it. The leader of the rebellion was Nathaniel Bacon, a member of a land-owning family. The causes were numerous, including objections to unfair taxes, favoritism in political appointments, and general poverty. Many of the rebels also chafed at the government's policies toward Native Americans on the frontier, which they considered too lenient. It would be fair to say that a general and long-standing malaise, spiced with the irritants of myriad personal grievances, underlay the revolt. For our purposes, however, the most significant aspect of the uprising was the aggregate nature of the rebel force.

Like other, smaller revolts of that period, Bacon's Rebellion offers little indication of internal racial divisions, or even any major concerns with differing "racial" identities among the rebels. When the authorities finally quashed the revolt, one of the last bands of rebel holdouts consisted of eighty Africans and twenty Europeans.⁴⁷

For the elites, this event surely was a nightmare come true. Although the rebellion failed, and the authorities hanged hundreds of the rebels, the conditions that had given rise to the rebellion in the first place remained. It would have been easy to imagine that this was only the beginning.

Divide and Rule

In the context of Bacon's Rebellion, the authorities developed a strategy to "divide and rule" the lower classes. In the course of historic events, it is rarely possible to identify a single moment in which a major era begins. There are some exceptions, however. We might think of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan, or the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand (which precipitated World War I), as examples. With regard to American racism, Bacon's Rebellion and its aftermath serves as a comparable milestone.

Ironically, the rebellion itself was fundamentally non-racist in its aspects. But this very fact turned out to be a central factor in fanning the elites' fears of future uprisings of the same sort. The "interracial" nature of the rebellion was one of its most threatening aspects. To prevent further eruptions, authorities worked to promote deep divisions between the various constituencies who had joined forces in common cause and endeavored to set them off against one another. The strategy was to divide them into factions, thus neutralizing them as a collectivity.

With odd clarity, we can see the establishment of racism here as a conscious policy. Certainly the strategy had its antecedents; most of the ingredients had been available for a long time. It had roots in rigid class structure, which became more extreme in conjunction with growing economic disparities both in England and in the English colonies. American racism, however, marked a departure from an earlier situation in which, for the most oppressed, the issues they had in common were far more visible to them than physical differences among or between them. A degree of “class solidarity,” or at least a sense of common cause, had existed among slaves and indentured servants and drawn strength and energy from their sense of oppression and their shared animosity toward the elites. Fears among the ruling classes, vastly outnumbered and sensing their own vulnerability, led to their efforts to weaken the threat by setting the most miserable segments of the population against one another.

The clearest fault line differentiated indentured servants, who at least had some hope for a better future, from African slaves, who had little or none. In the immediate days after the rebellion, the authorities “declared amnesty for white servants who had rebelled, but not to blacks.”⁴⁸ Henceforth, indentured servants who finished their terms of contract received land, a musket, cash, and a supply of corn. For slaves, the term of servitude had no end except in death. Slavery also continued for their children, whether these children were still with them at the end, or had been sold long before.

Colonial militias recruited poor “whites,” including many former indentured servants, and armed them to hunt down escaped slaves. Laws in most colonies forbade slaves to have firearms. Authorities encouraged impoverished “whites,” at the bottom of the social and economic scale, to believe that miserable as they were, they at least were superior to “Negroes.”

By the 1700s, the promotion of divisions between indentured servants and African slaves was explicit policy. Colonies passed laws prohibiting sexual relations between “whites” and “Negroes.” (Many states still had such laws as late as the 1960s.) Children of such unions, rather than being recognized as having mixed parentage, were simply defined as “Negro”—a view that anticipated the “one drop of blood” principle of the nineteenth century. This worked to prevent, by disguising or legally denying, the growth of a large, visible constituency of “mixed” parentage. A vocabulary did arise acknowledging mixed parentage with such terms as “mulatto,” “octaroon,” or “quadroon”; but these distinctions did little to alleviate the overall discrimination associated with being “non-white.” Social practice and official policy reduced diversity and amalgamation to the two exclusive categories of “white” and “black.”

Native Americans on the Colonial Frontiers

For the poor, the indentured, and the enslaved of European and African descent, relations with Native Americans had their own complexities. A critical aspect was the westward expansion of English settlers who, as a result, encroached more and more on indigenous people's lands. A major impetus for this expansion was the upper classes' having claimed the best lands near the coast. As new immigrants arrived and indentured servants acquired their freedom, the pressure for land could only push people farther inland.

Since Native Americans justifiably resisted this encroachment, conflicts were inevitable. Whatever English attitudes toward indigenous peoples might have been at the outset, settlers on the frontier quickly saw their interests in direct conflict with those who occupied the lands they wanted. The wealthy landowning classes had somewhat different interests in the matter. They might have felt little sympathy for Native peoples as such, but they were fearful that disruption and violence on the frontier could pose a threat to the stability of the situation they enjoyed.

In an effort to defuse the issue, King George III issued a Royal Proclamation in 1763 that prohibited settlements in "Indian territory" west of a line extending from what is now Canada roughly along the Appalachian Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. This fiat was all but unenforceable, however. By its very nature, the frontier was a region in which legal and political authority had little impact, far from settled areas. A major effect of the Proclamation, in fact, was to add still another item to the colonists' list of grievances that eventually led to the American Revolution.

Native American relationships with African slaves were also complicated. The Creek, Choctaw, and other groups gave shelter to runaway slaves, many of whom joined their communities, intermarried, and established families. In the nineteenth century this became a rationale for American assaults on the Seminoles and other native peoples in the Southeast. But even before the American Revolution, colonial authorities worked to undermine the development of positive relations between African slaves and Native Americans. The Governor of South Carolina wrote in 1738 that "It has always been the policy of this government to create an aversion in [the Indians] to Negroes."⁴⁹ Howard Zinn quotes another official who explicitly states the need "to make Indians & Negroes a cheque upon each other lest by their Vastly Superior Numbers we should be ambushed by one or the other."⁵⁰

In the southern reaches of the Mississippi River, French relationships with African slaves and native peoples of the region were a bit more nuanced. Inter-marriage among all groups in that region was far less rare than it was in the English colonies. The French also developed the *Code*

Noir, which supposedly extended some rights and protections to slaves and addressed the responsibilities of masters. There is little evidence that any slave was ever able to use the code in court, however.⁵¹

French relationships with native peoples in the southern Mississippi drainage were volatile, and the Natchez, who had been numerous and powerful before disease reduced their population, decided to take action against the French in the early part of the eighteenth century. Having seen the nature of African slavery and fearing that given their weakened position, the French might overrun them and enslave them as well, they attacked French settlements and killed hundreds. The Natchez also gave refuge to many slaves and adopted them into their communities. Their triumph was brief, however. The French managed to forge an alliance with the Choctaw to the east, who attacked and defeated the Natchez and burned the slaves at the stake.⁵²

Although we could consider numerous other cases, these few suffice to illustrate an important pattern. It is clear that racism in the American colonies was neither “primordial” nor an entirely spontaneous, unintended development. Although racism had roots in broad conditions and circumstances that had arisen over centuries, these conditions offered opportunities for some to cultivate and exploit—often as a premeditated strategy. Racism arose from the conflicts of competing interests. We can see an almost astonishing candor in the policies of promoting it as a tool of the powerful to divide and rule the weaker, but potentially dangerous, oppressed segments of the population. Having considered some of the events that gave rise to the concept of “race” and the social, cultural, economic, and political factors involved, we might now take a closer look at the intellectual milieu in which these views developed.

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CHAPTER 5

Intellectual and Political Sources of Racism

It is ironic that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment provided the ground in which modern racism germinated—ironic, because the Enlightenment provided the basis for modern ideals of equality, participatory democracy, progress through reason, and the perfectibility of humankind. How, from this, did a point of view arise that denies equality, opposes social justice, and laughs at the idea of perfectibility for entire populations?

To address this question we need to recall what the Enlightenment was about and why we refer to it by that name. In one sense, the Enlightenment was a constellation of ideas that grew out of, and departed from, an earlier time in European history when knowledge and understanding generally meant acquiring a firm grasp of the scriptures and maintaining a faith that earthly events unfold according to God's will. Scientific and technological innovations flickered here and there, but ideas that seemed to challenge the orthodox view of the world often had severe consequences for those who proposed them. We have the examples of Copernicus in 1543 and Galileo in the 1600s, who demonstrated that the sun, not the Earth, is the center of this part of the universe. Galileo suffered imprisonment and house arrest at the hands of the church for such heresy until he recanted in 1632 and, thoroughly chastened, retired to a more secluded life under the suspicious gaze of the church authorities.

In the pre-Enlightenment era, the emphasis in learning tilted more toward the status quo than toward change, or "progress." Church authorities vied with kings and nobles for political power, but all worked within the same framework of Christian doctrine and a view of the world in which past glories trumped the miseries of the present. Yet during the era from the fall of the Roman Empire to the modern period, the nature of humanity and the issue of human differences engaged many thinkers.

Early European Ideas about Ethnic Difference

Although Europe and North America seem to have been the primary incubators of racism, it is difficult to find any such concept in Europe early in the Christian era. The Bible, though based on events and traditions originating outside Europe, was one of the main feeder streams for Euro-American intellectual endeavors. The Bible provided validation for an extraordinary array of doctrines, social policies, and general recommendations according to various interests, ranging from celibacy to slavery. As far as human difference is concerned, however, the opinions we encounter in most of the Bible tend toward consensus.

Paul of Tarsus maintained that "all flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds."¹ Nothing here about different kinds of flesh for different kinds of people. The author of Acts 17:26 asserted that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." The phrase "made of one blood" seems clear enough.

Despite a general neglect of classical literature in Europe during the first few centuries of the Christian Era (C.E.), it seems that old attitudes about the underlying sameness of human beings persisted. In no way, of course, does this mean that everyone got along splendidly. An array of curious beliefs abounded that sound contradictory to the idea of a single human nature. For centuries to come, ideas would persist that people existed in nether parts of the world with three heads, cloven hooves, tails, or one eye in the middle of their chests. But notwithstanding such bizarre tales, a body of learned writing in Europe is consistent with the idea that all humans are fundamentally alike. Writers of the first few centuries C.E. attributed apparent human differences to factors ranging from climate to divine intervention, but the causes they offered referred to experiential rather than innate factors. If anything, what is intrinsic is a common humanity. In the fifth century C.E., for example, Augustine asserted that

Whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast.²

The issues of human diversity and commonality tangled inextricably with interpretations of scripture and continued to do so into the twenty-first

century. If the Bible is correct, then Adam and Eve were the first people. Everyone on earth, therefore, must be one of their descendants—unless there is some twist to it. Were there other creations, perhaps? Does the Bible hint at such a possibility? If that is the case, are other populations fully human? Or perhaps they are different from us because they were punished for some biblical crime. All that, and more, was to come into discussion in later centuries. As for the so-called “Dark Ages” in Europe, however, the jury was very much in agreement. As Augustine put it, “if they are human, they are descended from Adam.”

Other early church writers concurred. In the third century C.E., Octavius declared that “all men are begotten alike, with a capacity and ability of reasoning and feeling, without preference of age, sex, or dignity.”³ He also asserted that people do not “obtain wisdom by fortune, but have it implanted by nature,” apparently in equal measure. As in many writings of the time, there was a strong sense that divine force affects human affairs; but, for the most part, a supposition of basic equality underlay the various effects of divine will. Lactantius expressed the view that God “willed that all should be equal, that is, equally matched. He has imposed on all the same condition of living; he has produced all wisdom....”⁴

Thomas Aquinas, probably the most influential philosopher of the Roman Catholic Church, died in 1274, but his contributions, which were instrumental in developing a theology that became the foundation of church philosophy, derived a good deal from his study of the works of Aristotle who had lived fifteen centuries earlier. Aquinas, picking up a thread of classical thought centuries after Octavius and Lactantius, asserted that “by nature, all men are equal.”⁵ Aquinas argued that humanity is all of a piece—that “all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they received from their first parents.” The idea of an intrinsic nature that all humans shared is clear in his thinking. His statement also conveys a concept that this nature is inherited. This idea, in light of subsequent developments, was to have significant implications.

The notion that humans are subject to “laws of nature” was common in the thirteenth century, though at the time, no one openly doubted that these laws had divine origins. In the second and third centuries C.E., Tertullian argued that church laws and natural laws were pretty much in harmony, and he ventured the opinion that “the argument for Christian practices becomes all the stronger, when also nature, which is the first rule of all, supports them.”⁶ Given the idea of a common “true” nature that all human beings shared, what

were the characteristics of this nature? Opinions varied on this issue. Ambrose in the fourth century C.E. perceived a basic decency in humankind.

This is a true law of nature which binds us to show all kindly feeling, so that we should all of us in turn help one another, as parts of one body, and should never think of depriving another of anything, seeing it is against the law of nature even to abstain from giving help.⁷

Nearly a thousand years later, however, Dante Alighieri's view of human nature had soured a bit: "O thou our human nature, ever prone to sin! O thou, full of iniquity from the first and ever afterwards without cessation!"⁸ Aquinas, on the other hand, saw natural law "promulgated by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known by him naturally."⁹

Although these writers shared the idea that human nature, noble or iniquitous as it might be, was guided or molded by divine force, this concept left room for other factors that could account for human differences. To the extent that European thinkers in the first millennium or so of the Christian Era concerned themselves with the characteristics of other populations at all, they were quite willing to follow the lead of the Greeks and look to environmental causes for diversity. Writing in the seventh century, Bishop Isidore of Seville pointed out that

In accordance with diversity of climate, the appearance of men and their color and bodily size vary and diversities of mind appear. Thence we see the Romans are dignified, the Greeks unstable, the Africans crafty, the Gauls fierce by nature and somewhat headlong in their disposition which the character of climates bring about.¹⁰

Environmental Explanation in Early Modern European Thinking

Social thought in Europe began to change in the 1500s. At that time, European contacts with other populations were escalating. With the Renaissance, we can perceive a different energy in some social writing—an increased curiosity and some freshening of ideas to supplement and modify the old. Interest in other peoples of the world increased, although in many instances, it was mainly for the purpose of gaining new insights into Europe's own social milieu and provided material to make points of social criticism. Environmental explanation continued to account for human diversity; but during this period, we can also discern the first marked appearance of a concept of biologically inherent differences.

Centuries after Aquinas, the impetus to examine and even to manipulate the world became impossible to suppress. In 1527, Paracelsus tampered with God's will by using chemical medicines to treat disease.¹¹ In 1546, Girolamo Fracastro developed the idea that diseases are the effects of living microscopic entities that pass from person to person. Leonhart Fuchs in 1542 compiled an illustrated guide to 400 plants, and in 1583, Andrea Caralpino published the first modern plant classification. Andreas Vesalius published an illustrated study of human anatomy in 1543, and in 1546, Georgius Agricola published a handbook of mineralogy. Simon Stevin demonstrated in 1585 that two objects of different weights fall at the same speed. In 1628, William Harvey established the fact that blood circulates throughout the body, and Isaac Newton, in 1637, developed the laws of motion and the principle of universal gravitation. These amount to only a few examples of the intellectual activity that flourished in those times. All of these achievements had significant impact in part because after 1455, the printing press with moveable type facilitated the production of multiple copies of books.

Such insights and discoveries did not necessarily challenge church teachings or directly question the existence and power of God, but they reflected an urge to seek increased knowledge and a better understanding of the physical world. No doubt many scholars at the time could easily accept the principle that different weights fall at the same speed but still assume that God, if He wished, could make them rise up and fly away. Yet scientific observations could operate with an expectation that normally, God did no such thing. These inquiries and conclusions were consistent with a sense that the world, whatever its origins, operates according to regular principles, or laws of nature. If God had originally created those laws, so be it.

This Enlightenment perspective—the idea that it is possible to discover such laws through careful observation, measurement, and experimentation—provided the basis for a science that was essentially secular, even if that science might operate within a universe whose origins were divine. If God had created these laws, they still operated as regularities, and the issue at hand was to understand what they were and how they worked. To do so required study of the physical world, not speculation about spiritual forces.

Thinkers also grappled with the implications that natural law held for the differences among particular societies and populations. In the 16th century, Alberico Gentili asserted that “what is natural to men is common to all men.”¹² Roberto Bellarmine, in the same century, suggested that “the law of nations is a sort of conclusion drawn from natural law by human reason.”¹³ In these statements we still see little hint of any idea that intrinsic, fixed differences exist

among human populations. It would be a couple of centuries before such an assumption would become a prominent aspect of popular wisdom.

In the meantime, however, the study of biology was becoming a focus of intellectual interest. Human anatomy became a serious field of study with the sixteenth-century work of Andreas Vesalius, but his biological focus notwithstanding, Vesalius's theories about the physical differences he perceived among various human populations still rested on a strong environmental or experiential explanatory base:

The Germans, indeed, have a very flattened occiput and a broad head, because the boys always lie on their backs in their cradles... More oblong heads are reserved to the Belgians... because their mothers permit their little boys to sleep turned over in their beds, and as much as possible on their sides.¹⁴

Jean Bodin pondered the apparent differences among populations in the sixteenth century, but balked at any simplistic resort to climate alone as a causal factor,

... for we see in climates that be alike and of the same elevation foure notable differences of people in color, without speaking of other qualities, for that the West Indians are generallie of a duskish color like unto a roasted quinze, unlesse it be a handful of men that are black, whom the tempest carried from the coast of Affrike, and in Sivill of Spaine the men are white, onne Esperance black, at the River of Plata of a chestnut color, all being like in latitude, and like climates.¹⁵

Bodin did associate specific regions with character traits, however.

... the people of the South [of Europe] are of a contrarie humour and disposition to them of the North... the one is joyful and pleasant, the other sad; the one is fearful and peaceable, the other is hardie and mutinous; the one is sociable, the other solitarie; the one is given to drinke, the other sober; the one rude and grosse witted, the other advised and ceremonious; the one is prodigal and greedie, the other is covetous and holds fast; the one is a souldier, the other a philosopher; the one fit for arms and labour, the other for knowledge and rest.¹⁶

Bodin saw multiple factors affecting the characteristics of different populations, including many we might categorize as social or historical.

But those that dwell in vallies become soft and slothful through the richness of the soyle. And as they that lie upon the sea for their traffique, and those of

barren countries for their sobrieties, are industrious; in like sort those which make the frontiers of two estates being enemies, are more fierce and warlike than the rest, for that they are continually in warre, which makes men barbarous, mutinous, and cruell; as peace makes men quiet, courteous, and tractable.¹⁷

The diversity of human existence also intrigued Michel de Montaigne, who lived during the same period. Such diversity, he wrote, “gives us a relish for human nature in so perpetual a variety of forms.”¹⁸ Montaigne’s open-minded receptivity to other modes of life was unusual for his time, and perhaps for ours as well.

“Barbarians are in no way more wonderful to us than we are to them, nor with more reason,” he observed.¹⁹ Referring to what he had learned of the native peoples of the coast of Brazil, he noted that “I can see nothing barbarous or uncivilized about it, except that we call barbarism that which does not fit in with our usages.”²⁰ Montaigne used this broader cross-cultural perspective to drive home his observations about his own society. “We may therefore call these people barbarians in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity.”²¹ And in the same vein, “The savages who roast and eat the bodies of their dead do not scandalize me as much as they who persecute and torture the living.”²²

It is clear enough that throughout the longstanding endeavor to account for what people do and why they do it, the notion of human malleability resting on the concept that raw human material is much the same everywhere predominated well into the sixteenth century in Europe and elsewhere. Ideas of human nature, whether framed in theological or secular terms, tended to be pan-human in scope.

In this context, persistent accounts of monstrous populations whose members had a single foot, no head, and so on, who supposedly dwelt outside the fringes of the known world, are interesting—particularly since for centuries, European merchants, missionaries, religious pilgrims, and crusaders by the thousands had traveled beyond Europe and interacted with “exotic” peoples. But the perennial popularity of such fabulous tales throughout more than a thousand years may have resulted not so much from a lack of information as it did from the appeal these tales held for the beleaguered people of Europe. Objective information and prosaic details about the way real people lived in faraway lands might not have been all that intriguing to a population who for centuries had suffered plagues, social and political injustice, and economic deprivation. They had experienced invasions of Arabs from the south, of Vikings from the north, of Mongols from the east, and been browbeaten by the powerful and threatening institution of the church. Perhaps the escapist entertainment of such bizarre accounts offered a welcome diversion.

Whatever the relationship of these earlier tales of exotic wonders and monstrosities might have had to later views of “race,” however, they did imply a component of biological fixity in human difference. Notes by Leonardo da Vinci suggest a view that biology plays a major role in the inheritance of characteristics.

The black races in Ethiopia are not the product of the sun; for if a black gets black with child in Scythia, the offspring is black; but if a black gets a white woman with child the offspring is grey. And this shows that the seed of the mother has power in the embryo equally with that of the father.²³

Up to that point, assumptions about universal human qualities in European thought were consistent with the idea that ultimately, all living people are descended from Adam and Eve. This assumption precluded an emphasis on biologically fixed human differences resulting from separate creations, but it also allowed for the implication that underlying qualities in general are inherited. As long as almost everyone accepted the idea of a single creation, that premise underscored the assumption of a common humanity. But when some began to challenge the assumption that all human populations share a single origin, the idea that people inherit traits or qualities from their parents and ancestors could become an argument for fundamental and insurmountable inequalities. And so it did.

An argument of this sort appeared in the work of Giordano Bruno in the sixteenth century. Alluding to some of the major human populations, Bruno mingled them with “Gigantic monsters of the south” and the mysterious “Pygmies” who supposedly lived underground. The thrust of his argument was that such beings, including the “many colors” of the “... species of men and the black race.... of the Ethiopians, and the yellow offspring of America... cannot be traced to the same descent, nor are they sprung from the generative force of a single ancestor.”²⁴

In the following centuries, this idea of biologically fixed human differences continued to develop almost in parallel fashion with older concepts that emphasized human malleability; eventually, it became the dominant view. By the nineteenth century, ideas of inherent differences had become a central component of full-blown “scientific racism.”

Early Developments of “Racial” Thinking in Europe

Europeans in the sixteenth century were beginning to deal with the rest of the world’s population in a different manner. For millennia, extensive trade networks had extended to connect Europe with the Middle East, Africa,

and Asia; but much of this trade had occurred in relay fashion. People in distant regions rarely came into direct contact. C. Loring Brace points out that before long-distance sea travel, anyone who ventured from one region to another—whether on foot, on horseback, or by watercraft along the coastline—could not have covered more than twenty or thirty miles in a day. In such a distance, differences in the physical appearance of local populations would not have been discernible, if they existed at all. Transoceanic voyages, however, exposed travelers to greater contrasts.²⁵

After the fifteenth century the nature and complexity of European relationships with foreign populations also changed. Rather than simple long-distance trade in commodities, conquest of much of the New World led to the extraction of raw materials and precious metals through the forced labor of indigenous populations. These indigenous people died by the thousands, then by the millions, at a time when the entire population of the world probably totaled just a few hundred million.

As we noted in the last chapter, European countries, particularly England, had begun to overrun domestic resources that had been adequate to support their own agrarian populations for millennia. As their resources became scarcer, these powers developed an insatiable appetite for those available in other parts of the world. England, which for many centuries had been one of the world's more innocuous nations, became a great maritime power, eventually gaining sovereignty over native peoples in large areas of Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and North America. Europeans in the past had dealt with other populations as equivalent partners in trade, and sometimes as formidable enemies worthy of respect. In the course of exploration and conquest, however, Europeans came to see large portions of the world's human population as components in a vital economic enterprise who, in certain ways, were less human than their exploiters.²⁶

By the mid-1500s, Portuguese shippers were negotiating with indigenous tribute states of the west coast of Africa for slaves to obtain the massive labor force required to work sugar plantations in Brazil. On the South Atlantic coast of North America and the West Indies, English and Irish convicts, indentured servants, Native Americans, and Africans labored on English tobacco and sugar plantations. The English, who for generations had raised sheep to supply wool for the Dutch cloth industry, developed a cottage weaving industry of their own. In the process, English weavers shifted from wool produced domestically to cotton, which could not grow well in the English climate even if extensive fields had been available for planting it. Cotton required warmer regions, and before long, cotton plantations in the southern colonies became the major suppliers of raw materials for British textile mills. With the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, a manufacturing system developed with a ravenous need

for raw materials, labor, and markets, and by the seventeenth century, slavery had become an integral part of the system that gave an impetus to Europe's industrial development. Eric Williams notes that in the major shipping port of Liverpool, the decorative facade of the Customs House celebrated the slave trade with carved heads of Africans.²⁷

European societies changed internally during this era. Social distinctions and economic differentiation intensified, and, as we have seen, attitudes associated with social class in England coincided with the development of racist views toward foreign populations. With the onset of slavery as a basis for economic growth, the systematic and massive coercion of populations who differed from Europeans in culture, language, and physical appearance became an essential aspect of the Euro-American economic structure. The later British conquest of India, and such practices as "blackbirding," or kidnapping Pacific Islanders for coerced plantation labor, continued this pattern. The adoption of a biological framework to rationalize claims of "racial" inequality developed in concert with the growing dependence upon human exploitation. Such a framework provided an intellectual justification for ongoing social, economic, and political practices.

Scientific Rationales

As we know, biology and the other scientific disciplines rest on the notion that the universe is subject to laws that can be discovered and understood, and whose results human beings can even predict, if only they are bright, inquisitive, and persistent enough. The ideal of a secular, rational, and dispassionate mode of inquiry capable of addressing difficult questions about the natural world and the place of human beings within it inspired great expectations of progress. But when it became expedient to consider some human populations as fundamentally different and inferior, science was available to provide a rationale. By the nineteenth century, assertions of human difference came to be expressed in scientific, biological terms.

Slavery and colonialism might well have gone on just as they did without any such "scientific" rationale. Throughout history, after all, people have done terrible things to each other (including enslaving each other) without resorting to biological justification. But beginning in the seventeenth century, numerous social and economic aspects of the era nurtured the idea that human populations differ so profoundly from one another that their common humanity was no longer a necessary assumption. To a great extent, Euro-American-style racism is a product of that segment of history. Indeed, we might even consider racism an accident of history, except that the convergences of these factors make it seem almost inevitable.

Although biology offered a conceptual framework for viewing difference, the study of biology did not, in itself, provide an independent scientific basis for Euro-American racism. After several centuries, biology has yet to produce any firm evidence that differences among human populations—as opposed to individual pathologies—have any behavioral significance. As we know, reputable biological studies have refuted such claims. Although racists have appropriated the mantle of biology as a cultural theme to lend social validity to political ideology and policies, biology as a science has never actually substantiated European or American racism.

The Idea of Humans as Part of Nature

The Enlightenment's intellectual climate invited exploration of the social as well as the biological realm. Medieval interests had dwelt on such issues as morality in terms of absolute strictures originating in a higher power. Enlightenment writers evinced more concerns with social justice and the legitimacy of governance. Society became, ideally, a matter of social contract between the ruler and the governed, rather than a paternalistic entity over which nobles presided by divine right. Many thinkers came to see society itself as a part of the natural world rather than a realm distinct from it. The dynamics of social forces might be difficult to discover, but in the opinion of many scholars, these dynamics were not supernatural manipulations but aspects of natural law. Again, their approach to understanding was secular, not theological.

For centuries, learned people had considered humans to be above nature as a result of their special creation in the Garden of Eden. But Enlightenment thinkers were more inclined to see humanity as part of the natural world. In the mid-seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza wrote

Most writers on the emotions and on human conduct seem to be treating rather of matters outside nature than of natural phenomena following nature's general laws. They appear to conceive man to be situated in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom, for they believe that he disturbs rather than follows nature's order.... Nothing comes to pass in nature, which can be set down to a flaw therein; for nature is always the same.... There should be one and the same method of understanding the nature of all things whatever...²⁸

Spinoza wrote in an era when the Enlightenment had barely begun, but his views foreshadowed later scholars' rejection of mysticism in human life. He differed from many Enlightenment philosophers, however, in scoffing at the illusion that humans had power over their own affairs, or that an individual

"had absolute control over his actions, and that he is determined solely by himself."²⁹

Later writers such as Locke and Rousseau placed far greater value on the autonomy of the human mind. They expressed hope, and even faith, in the capacity for thought, observation, and rational choice, although they did not underestimate the role of folly in human affairs. As Locke noted,

I easily grant that there are great numbers of opinions which, by men of different countries, education, and tempers, are received and embraced as first and unquestionable principles; many whereof, both for their absurdity as well as opposition to one another, it is impossible should be true.³⁰

Although they acknowledged the social environment's effect in molding attitudes and awareness, Enlightenment philosophers' major theme was the importance of reason.

Ignorance was the enemy of reason. So was mindless, unquestioning acceptance of convention. Learning and rational thought were the means to rise above such thralldom. Enquiries about the speed of planetary rotation, the refraction of light, and the nature of the good society all were aspects of the same intellectual endeavor. Humans might be part of nature, but unlike other living organisms, humans had the capacity—indeed, the obligation—to expand their knowledge, to analyze, to question and critique, and to seek solutions to problems. In the minds of many Enlightenment writers, rational, critical inquiry would be the driving force for improving human existence, the source of progress.

These views led in multiple directions. As we have noted, the idea that humans are part of nature coincided with a time of increasing European contact with populations in other parts of the world. Just as researchers compiled classifications of plants and minerals, the question of what to make of differences among human populations became a subject of study and contemplation. In 1735, Carolus Linnaeus published a system of classification that encompassed all known plant and animal life; and in so doing, he included humans in his taxonomy.³¹ Linnaeus used a binomial system that has been the major basis for biological classification ever since, with terms for *genus*—major type—and *species*, distinct subdivisions of the genus.

In classifying humans, Linnaeus was working with limited data and a great deal of misinformation, incorporating various stereotypes of peoples who inhabited (or were thought to inhabit) distant regions.³² With rare exceptions, those Europeans who had occasion to deal with peoples in remote places—not always on a friendly basis—seldom concerned themselves with obtaining dispassionate, detailed, or accurate information about them. No

doubt it would have been difficult to acquire such information, even if they had wished to do so. As a consequence, Linnaeus's information contained as much caricature as science. But his divisions of humankind established a precedent for the idea that human populations differ at the level of subspecies, and even at the level of species.

Linnaeus's taxonomy of human types suffered from other constraints. He lived in a pre-Darwinian era when ideas of sequential evolution were tentative, at best. Despite Enlightenment thinkers' departure from theological explanation, the idea that divine creation had originally produced all of the existing forms of plants and animals enjoyed a general acceptance. The variety of forms constituted the "Great Chain of Being."³³

The Great Chain of Being resembled later models of biological evolution in some respects, but it differed in important ways. If we can imagine modern evolutionary models as vertical, expressing change through time and depicting a process of branching differentiation, we can better visualize the Great Chain of Being on a horizontal plane. Differences among types of life in the Great Chain of Being ran along a continuum from plant to animal and from simple to complex; but supposedly, it was a spectrum that had existed from the time of Creation. The implication was not that any form had developed from, or into, another, but only that some were closer to others in their general characteristics.

The Linnaean idea of species also predated the modern concept of breeding populations with shared gene pools. With the idea of shared gene pools comes the understanding that populations have boundaries beyond which they are unable to produce viable, fertile offspring with members of other distinct populations. The Linnaean model did not involve gradations of genetic compatibility, let alone evolutionary change.

The idea that species *could* change, and that they had done so over long periods of time, was far in the future. Darwin's and Wallace's insights into this matter provoked extreme controversy in the mid-nineteenth century; and, as we know, the controversy has persisted in some circles to the present day.³⁴ A rudimentary understanding of genetics, based on the work of Gregor Mendel, would have to wait till the early twentieth century to become part of general biological thinking.³⁵ Paradoxically, however, in the eighteenth century some writers speculated about possible interbreeding between human populations and apes—a proposition that should have been almost as preposterous to adherents of the Great Chain of Being as it is to modern biologists.

We need to remember that the Enlightenment did not amount to a uniform program to which everyone adhered. The Enlightenment involved a diverse pool of ideas. It was an arena of inquiry in which many novel questions arose. During this time, ideas challenged and jostled against each

other—and against many long-standing assumptions and concepts, some of which were very old indeed. Much Enlightenment writing drew energy from critiques of conventional wisdom and theological assumptions. In that vein, consensus would have been inconsistent with the Enlightenment's spirit of inquiry.

In the meantime, various economic and political developments stimulated and informed intellectual discussion. Enlightenment writers found the basis of an argument for human equality in their faith in the power of rational thought. Thus, at a fundamental level, these writers asserted that essential human nature and human potential existed throughout the globe, and that evident differences among human populations were the results of their various experiences. Ironically, however, these ideas provided a basis for later racist assertions—ideas that would have been anathema to most Enlightenment thinkers. This admixture of ideas, however, required a strange conflation of science and the persistent assumption of the divine creation (or creations) of humans.

Roots of "Racial" Conflict in North America

Although modern racism grew from some of the peculiarities of American history, much of its character developed in England during the sixteenth century and earlier in policies toward the Celtic peoples of the British Isles. In that case, skin pigmentation could hardly have been an issue. English authorities found other rationales to define the Irish as a lower order of beings.

The basis for this dehumanization was not merely a matter of English disapproval of Irish customs and manners. Irish lands were a major incentive for invasion, conquest, and occupation; and as a rationale for English policies, the dehumanization of the Irish served well. English armies burned Irish villages and killed those who resisted or could not escape. Then English settlers occupied their emptied lands. Unable to seize the island entirely, the English occupied an area insulated from the "wild Irish" who still lived "beyond the Pale," outside the area under English control. As we noted in the last chapter, it was largely from this experience that the concept of "irredeemable savages" established deep roots in English thought.³⁶

For the Irish who remained within the English sphere of influence, the authorities forbade the speaking of Gaelic and outlawed the bards, who served as repositories of oral history and tradition. Repercussions from that era resonate to this day in that part of the world, where half a millennium later, an uneasy truce exists. In recent history, the issues have taken on the overtones of a conflict over religion—Protestant versus Catholic—but these categories reverberate with "Irish" versus "English" sentiments. Indeed, it

was British troops who occupied Belfast in Northern Ireland on “Bloody Sunday” in 1972 and gunned down angry, but unarmed Irish protestors, killing thirteen and wounding many more. Irish separatists, in the name of the Irish Republican Army, carried out numerous bombings and other attacks in England in the 1970s and 1980s during the “Troubles,” which millions now, in the twenty-first century, hope have ended at last.

Most European colonial powers in the Americas had conflicts with indigenous populations, but as we have seen, the English differed from the others in demanding and enforcing stricter social boundaries between themselves and native peoples. This social distance also applied in Ireland, expressed in the Statutes of Kilkenny and reinforced by the hierarchical structure of English society, which would have made intermarriage, or even close fraternization, undesirable and fraught with social liabilities. In North America, still more extreme cultural differences complicated English interaction with Native Americans, although we find little evidence even here that skin color in itself was a major issue in the seventeenth century. As we have seen, the non-Christian beliefs of Native Americans loomed larger, especially in New England, where the Puritans suspected indigenous people of “conjuring,” witchcraft, and consorting with Satan.

The more fundamental issue in North America, as in Ireland, was that indigenous peoples occupied land that the English wanted. This impetus, coupled with a recently developed English sense of themselves which allowed them to deny full human status to other peoples, led to adversarial tensions that only the English numerical disadvantage kept in check. But even these logistic considerations did not always prevail. As we know, early settlers on the Virginia coast, after the local native people had helped them to survive their first harsh winter, subsequently turned on their hosts and attacked them.

Wealth and power disparities among the English themselves and the hierarchical structure of their social system inhibited meaningful social or cultural assimilation on the part of indigenous constituencies of the populations, except in the form of labor. By the eighteenth century, African slaves throughout the colonies added further complexity to these interactions, and boundaries among the population tended to become still more rigid. As we have seen in Bacon’s Rebellion and its aftermath, conscious policies worked to prevent the lowest segments of the English population from joining forces with African slaves; and in most of the colonies, early laws prohibited people from voluntarily “running off to join the Indians.” People of these groups did mix, of course. Perhaps this is one case in which it *is* valid to refer to “human nature.” But after the American Revolution, the divisiveness only became deeper.

Demographic Complexities in North America

The trajectory of relationships in what would later become Canada differed in some respects from that in the United States. In the Prairie regions of British North America, offspring of Native peoples and fur traders—particularly French traders—came to form a distinct category known as *Metis*.³⁷ Acting self-consciously as an interest group, *Metis* sometimes came into conflict with Native peoples over competition in buffalo hunting, and in the nineteenth century they rebelled against the government in Ottawa over land rights. An additional aspect of this, certainly, was long-standing French/English tension in Canada. Most of the *Metis* had French as well as indigenous heritage, and English Canadians predominated in government. The Canadian government dealt harshly with *Metis* rebels and hanged their leader Louis Riel in 1885.³⁸ Yet the identity of the *Metis* as a distinct people in their own right has persisted, and the Canadian government formally recognized them as such in the Constitution Act of 1982.

The experience of the Canadian *Metis* differs in important ways from that of people with mixed parentage in the United States. In the United States, such people have tended to merge as individuals into the Native American, European, or African-American segments of the population rather than constituting a recognized "mixed" group. The term "halfbreed" entered the language as early as the eighteenth century, but unlike Canada or Mexico, the United States did not experience the development of widely recognized collective populations with shared heritages. Even in the late twentieth century, a few populations in the Southeast whose ancestry consists of an amalgam of European, African, and Native Americans fought strenuously for federal recognition as "Native Americans."³⁹ No status comparable to *Metis* was available to them, even if they had been inclined to claim it.

Numerous policies in the nineteenth century worked to define Native American identity on an either/or basis. Usually these stipulated a "blood quotient" or "blood quantum." Typically the requirement was one quarter, or in few cases, one-eighth "Indian blood" to qualify as a member of a particular Native American "tribe." For people with African American and European parentage, however, the principle of "one drop of blood" meant that *any* known African ancestry made one a "Negro." Thus, social and political myth prevailed over biological reality. Such terms as "mulatto," "quadroon," or "octoroon," common in the mid-nineteenth century, reflected at least some recognition of mixed parentage, as we have noted, but these categories rarely implied any social advantages except, perhaps, within the broadly disenfranchised community of "Negroes." Conventional wisdom maintained the myth of absolute racial boundaries, and in that framework, one either was "white" or not.⁴⁰

Distinctions between “white” and “nonwhite” shifted in the later decades of the nineteenth century. As more European immigrants joined the population of the United States, Irish—who arrived by the tens of thousands after the Potato Famine of the 1840s—remained near the bottom of the social scale, especially in urban areas of the Northeast. Although skin color was not a useful marker for discrimination, popular caricatures depicted Irish as lazy, brutish, stupid, unclean, and barely civilized. Most Irish immigrants faced severe poverty and struggled to survive through arduous, low-paying, and otherwise undesirable jobs, and their exclusion from more lucrative employment kept most of them poor. Infamous signs posted on storefronts and other businesses advised that “no Irish need apply.” Squalid living conditions only reinforced the negative stereotypes.

Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe also moved into cities, attempting to gain an economic foothold in whatever niches they could find. Many of these—Jews, Italians, and Slavs—did not acquire the full status of “white” in popular thinking until well into the twentieth century. Chinese immigrants also comprised large parts of the labor force in some regions, particularly on the West Coast, where they suffered brutal attacks by lower-class workers of European descent, who saw them as threats to their own status as cheap laborers.

Many of these groups established relatively closed communities as a basis for mutual support and protection. This aggregation was at least partly a reaction to external discrimination, threats, and even violence, but it also accentuated the difference between them and others. And after the war with Mexico ended in 1848, the United States also incorporated large numbers of Mexicans through the annexation of almost half of Mexico’s land area. Many of these Mexicans’ families had lived there since the early seventeenth century. Among such diverse populations, skin color alone would not have been a sufficient criterion for discrimination. Bigotry required additional justification.

Academic debates ensued over the characteristics of these groups, and intellectuals attempted to account for alleged differences among them. Often these debates and discussions rationalized negative stereotypes through the erudite language of scholarship. A lively academic industry developed over questions of human difference.

Racism and Slavery

At the most fundamental level, Enlightenment thinking of the eighteenth century had assumed an underlying human equality. One of the founding documents of the United States, after all, asserts that “all men are created equal”, and it seems reasonable to assume that most of the country’s founders

actually took this premise seriously. They certainly labored long and hard over the wording of the texts. Yet it was evident to any casual observer that in fact, inequality abounded on all sides. Wealth differences were obvious. It might have been possible to argue that the opportunity existed for people to better their situations through hard work, but this was far less plausible for slaves, who constituted a significant portion of the population. Slavery was the most glaring contradiction of Enlightenment ideals.

Britain abolished slavery early in the nineteenth century, although the English weaving industry, a key component of the national economy, continued long afterward to benefit from the cotton that slaves produced in the American South.⁴¹ Many British writers did, however, express strong disapproval of American slavery. British courts, in one instance, refused to return a slave to his American owner when both of them visited England. Popular revulsion toward slavery rose early in that century in England, largely as a result of a determined campaign by a few activists to raise anti-slavery consciousness among the public.

In the years after the American Revolution, some European writers' disdain for things American had other repercussions. The distinguished French naturalist George Louis Leclerc Buffon argued that in North America, the plants, animals, and indigenous human populations were relatively undeveloped and weak compared to their Old World counterparts.⁴² Buffon believed that America as a land mass was newer than Europe and Asia, and that as a consequence, the flora, fauna, and native inhabitants were less advanced. Other European writers, however, argued that the climate of North America had caused a *degeneration* of many living things. Rather than being in the early stages of development, the plants, animals, and humans, supposedly had *decreased* in size and vitality from their earlier forms.

Contradictory as these arguments were, they represented early versions of environmentalist views that sprang from the Enlightenment interest in natural history. Supposedly, the natural setting affected the growth, nature, and health of organisms. The writings of the American scholar Samuel Stanhope Smith reflect this view. According to Smith, Native Americans had darkened skin and a lethargic nature because they suffered from the insalubrious fumes of rotting forest vegetation and stagnant waters in their habitat.⁴³

Thomas Jefferson wrote a scholarly rebuttal to what he considered the insulting aspersions of Buffon and other Old World scholars. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he argued that North American plants, animals, and people in fact possessed superior vitality and strength.⁴⁴ It is probably significant that Jefferson had had far more personal contacts with Native Americans than most other writers who engaged in this debate, especially the European scholars. Jefferson had met with numerous native leaders to

discuss and negotiate agreements of various sorts—although many of these discussions had to do with land cessions.⁴⁵

Jefferson's remarks about slaves, however, were far more negative. While arguing for the vigor and vitality of most things North American, Jefferson saw imported slaves as a corrupting element, a distinctly inferior order of beings who presented a dilemma to American society. In Jefferson's view, slavery had created a smoldering and potentially explosive problem. Slaves, he argued, were a threat to the peace and security of the country, and he saw a growing likelihood that sooner or later they would rise up in vengeance for the injustices done to them. At one point he wrote "... I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just."⁴⁶

The fears of Jefferson and others drew some urgency from the slave revolt in Haiti (St. Domingue). African slaves, under the leaders Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jaques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe, overthrew their French overlords in 1789 and achieved independence. The revolt disrupted Napoleon's plans for an American empire and led to the United States' acquisition of France's vast territory in North America west of the Mississippi through the Louisiana Purchase. The Haitian Revolution also led the revolutionary National Convention in France to declare freedom for all slaves in all French territories.

The violent rebellion of slaves in Haiti stirred great misgivings and extensive debate in the United States. For the pro-slavery constituency, the alleged "savagery" of the revolt offered a rationale for still more oppressive measures. Opponents of slavery, conversely, presented the example of former slaves establishing an independent government as evidence of the profound injustice of slavery itself.

Slavery and Compromise

Thomas Jefferson may be one of the most complicated and perplexing figures among the founders of the United States. Some historians have portrayed him as a racist, others as antiracist. Debates have raged over his religious beliefs, if any. In the quotation above, Jefferson refers to "God," but in the midst of his campaign for the presidency, opponents called him an atheist.

Jefferson considered slavery to be a great evil, yet he owned hundreds of slaves. He considered Africans to be inferior to Europeans (and to Native Americans), but the evidence is now conclusive that he had a lasting sexual relationship with his slave Sally Hemmings, with whom he had several children. These children lived in his mansion, and he freed them in his will—almost certainly the result of a bargain with Sally Hemmings

herself—but by the most reliable accounts, he showed them little affection. Moreover, Jefferson did not free his other slaves at his death.

We can see in Jefferson some of the contradictions of American slavery in microcosm. Although he considered slavery a great wrong and ultimately a threat to the survival of the country, the danger he foresaw—that freed slaves would be consumed with a desire for vengeance—kept him from acting to end the wrong itself. Indeed, this belief worked to perpetuate it. On the other hand, it may not be too cynical to suspect that Jefferson, like many other slaveholders, willingly accepted the economic advantages that he enjoyed from slave labor.

Jefferson's case was not typical, even among wealthy plantation owners. Many of them were scarcely troubled by the idea that slavery was an atrocity, and they vigorously defended the institution. Some even argued that slavery was beneficial to the slaves.

George Washington, on the other hand, also a wealthy Virginia planter, gave most of his slaves their freedom in his will. During his life, Washington refused to break up slave families by selling individual members to distant owners—a common practice in those times. Nor, for the same reason, did he sell slaves who had married other slaves on adjacent plantations, on the grounds that this would destroy their families. Washington kept elderly slaves who were no longer able to work, and, by some accounts, took steps to provide for them. Toward the end of his life, according to Joseph Ellis, Washington's plantation housed a large number of aged slaves.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Washington argued vigorously against allowing African Americans to serve as armed troops in the Revolution.

It would be absurd, even monstrous, to suggest that any aspect of slavery was benign. But there is little doubt that slavery was, in many instances, even more vicious than it was on Washington's plantation. At the other end of the spectrum, Robert Carter III, also a Virginia slave owner, forbade his overseers to whip his slaves, and in 1791 began freeing his slaves a few at a time. Carter also made some of his land available for his freed slaves to rent.⁴⁸ These cases are far from representative, however. Slaves were property who, in many ways, were treated as other livestock, and often far more cruelly. Most owners had no qualms about selling children and separating them from their parents, raping slave women, and lashing slaves to the point of death.

To return to Jefferson's example, however, the contradictions between equality and slavery posed a moral dilemma with few logical avenues of escape. Since Jefferson would not countenance the abolition of slavery any time in the near future, the main refuge for him and others was to tinker with the idea of "equality." For Jefferson and others, "equality" essentially meant "equality among white males." (Women, even well-to-do "white" women, would not be

allowed to vote in the United States for another six or seven generations—not until the twentieth century.)

We can see one manifestation of this process in the Constitution itself, which credited southern states with voting representation at the rate of three-fifths of a vote per slave. This did not, of course, mean that slaves could cast votes. It only meant that the Southern states could have increased representation at the rate of three-fifths for every slave they possessed. It was a compromise designed to persuade the southern states to ratify the Constitution by offering them greater power and influence in government. In this measure, the Constitution made a profound statement about equality, now written into the founding legal document of the country.

The three-fifths compromise also reflected deep divisions among the various states regarding slavery itself. Partly, no doubt, the divisions arose from regional economic differences. Northern states had few plantations, although slavery had been common in that region as well. Only a few decades earlier, Newport, Rhode Island had been the busiest slave port in North America. But certainly there were other reasons as well.

In some quarters, the inferiority of Africans was not necessarily self-evident. Despite the prohibitions on slaves' learning to read, a few ex-slaves and free children of slaves acquired a high level of education and distinguished themselves as writers, poets, and political activists. African American newspapers appeared. Frederick Douglass, a former slave who built a distinguished career as a speaker, writer, and advisor to President Lincoln, founded his newspaper *The North Star* in 1851. Charles Ruggles and John Russwurm were recognized intellectuals and anti-slavery activists. The African Free Schools in Manhattan later became the foundation of the New York City public school system.

With such examples, it was necessary, even in the early nineteenth century, for defenders and proponents of slavery to argue the case for inherent inequality in opposition to those few, but assertive, voices who disputed the innate inferiority of Africans and other populations. Such voices included the influential European scholars Buffon and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach.

Debates over Africans

Some of the debate on this issue took place within a theological framework, with many on both sides claiming biblical support for their positions. The Bible offers references to slavery as well as strictures to "love thy neighbor" and to be merciful to the weak. But for Jefferson and many other men of science—very few women publicly joined this discussion in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—theological argument was not a congenial option. Steeped in the Enlightenment as Jefferson was, he did

not present himself as an atheist, but as a "deist." Like many of the other founders, including Benjamin Franklin, Jefferson could accept the idea that God might have created the universe and set things in motion, but that subsequently, things had operated pretty much on their own.

As to reasons for the supposed inferiority of Africans, Jefferson did not offer much insight, except to argue that as alien imports from a distant part of the Old World, they had little of the exuberant vitality of things American. This argument might seem a bit weak, since "white" Americans themselves had also come from the Old World. But then, Europe and Africa were not quite the same, were they?

The environmentalist approach in the hands of others led to more extreme speculation. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of the most distinguished physicians of his time, theorized that the North American environment would "cure" blackness. Away from the humid, unhealthy tropical climate of Africa, Rush believed, Africans in North America would eventually become white. Remarkably, Rush and other like-minded scholars actually discovered an African-American man named Henry Moss whose skin color had lightened in patches. This odd phenomenon is likely to have been a result of some undiagnosed illness, but Rush did not perceive the changes in Moss's skin as symptoms of any health problem. He saw them, rather, as signs of a "cure," a spontaneous recovery from the disease of dark pigmentation.⁴⁹

Samuel Stanhope Smith disagreed with Rush and saw Moss's particular case as an anomaly. Smith, like Rush, was one of the prominent scholars of his time. His reputation earned him a post at the College of New Jersey (which later became Princeton University), and he became its president in 1802.⁵⁰ Like Jefferson, Smith was a person of the Enlightenment who believed that true knowledge required observable facts rather than unquestioned popular beliefs or convictions "of the heart." Yet like most thinkers of his era, Smith accepted the idea that at the beginning, a Creator had set things in motion. As to observable differences among humans, Smith allowed for the possibility that Africans would become "white" in North America, but he contested the very idea that "Negroes" constituted a meaningful category. He pointed out that wide gradations of physical characteristics existed even within Africa, noting that pigmentation, hair form, facial structure, stature, and many other features showed great variation.

With regard to "beauty" or "intelligence," he argued, it was unfair and scientifically unsound to compare the most accomplished Europeans to the most abject Africans. Many people of European descent were illiterate, uncouth, and far from pleasing in their appearance. On the other hand, he pointed to African Americans who had distinguished themselves as poets

and scholars. Smith argued that no firm evidence supported the assertion of African inferiority, and in so doing he directly rebutted Jefferson, who had claimed that no intellectual achievements among Africans were comparable to those of Europeans (or European-Americans). How did Smith account for evident physical differences? He perceived support in the writings of Blumenbach, who like him, had questioned the idea that Africans were inferior. Like Smith, Blumenbach saw the environment as the cause of apparent differences.⁵¹

Blumenbach argued that human variation had arisen as a result of departure from original forms. He used the term “degeneration,” although he did not, apparently, see this as a “downward” trend, but rather as a divergence from an original form toward greater variety in different localities. Smith saw Blumenbach’s work as an affirmation of his own view that humans, whatever their origins, had changed as a result of their migration to different regions.

Debates over Origins

The debate over African equality or inferiority in the mid-nineteenth century took place in two major arenas. One was the realm of theology, where a major issue was whether Africans and other populations had all descended from Adam and Eve (or Eve and Adam), or God had created the “races” separately. Within this debate, there was little or no question that the creation, or creations, were divine events. Those who argued for a single creation (monogenesis) had the burden of accounting for the purported differences among human groups. Polygenesists, who argued for separate creations, faced the problem of accounting for the Bible’s apparent lack of any reference to such multiple origins.

The monogenesists’ position was generally compatible with environmentalist views such as those Smith espoused. With the monogenesis model, one could argue that the migration of humans from the Garden of Eden had led them into various parts of the world and exposed them to different natural settings where local environments worked to induce different physical responses. Such changes were not necessarily positive adaptations, however. In discussing Native Americans, Smith wrote

The American Indian inhabits an uncultivated forest, abounding with stagnant waters... the exhalation of the marshes, and the noxious gases evolved from decaying vegetables, impregnate the whole atmosphere, and give a deep bilious tinge to the complexion of the savage.⁵²

Other monogenesists favored alternative models to account for differences among human groups. One favorite was the attribution of differences

to the aftermath of the biblical flood. In that view, the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—became the founders of three “races.” The descendants of Shem, supposedly, became Arabs and Jews. Japheth went to the east and became the ancestor of Asians. Ham, according to this model, was ancestral to Africans. This story generally went beyond merely accounting for differences among “races,” however. Typically these accounts of African origins emphasized the “curse of Ham,” which originated in an unfortunate episode in which Ham “saw the nakedness of his father” while the old man lay uncovered in a drunken stupor. When Noah woke up, he cursed Ham, railing to the effect that “a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.”⁵³

Whether or not one wishes to take this story literally (the biblical account also goes on to say that Noah lived for 950 years), Joseph Graves points out that the Bible offers no suggestion that Ham was somehow connected with Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁴ Nor, for that matter, is there any reference in the passage to dark skin. Nonetheless, the idea of a scriptural basis for an everlasting condemnation of Ham’s descendants to be “servants of servants” had great appeal to those who wanted to have their Christianity and slavery, too.

One might expect that given the pro-slavery attitudes in the South, polygenesis would have a strong appeal there, since it would reinforce the idea that Africans were, in fact, a different sort of being from “whites.” But the strength of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity in the South militated against the widespread adoption of this idea. Most clergy would not countenance taking liberties with the scriptures, and a literal interpretation of the Bible forestalled acceptance of the idea of separate creations.

A few voices, however, took another position. Josiah Nott, a prominent Southern physician, was convinced that Africans could not have sprung from Adam and Eve. By all accounts, Nott was an excellent, forceful speaker, and he delighted in what he called “parson-skinning,” baiting the clergy on the issue of African origins. In collaboration with the Egyptologist and traveler George Robins Glidden, Nott argued that the appearance of dark-skinned Sub-Saharan Africans in ancient Egyptian paintings, many of which were thousands of years old, proved that too little time had passed between the time of Creation in 4004 B.C.E. and the dates of the Egyptian art for Africans to have become so distinct. As Nott and Glidden pointed out, the Africans in the paintings were not appreciably different in appearance from modern Africans.

Ultimately, the assumption that the world is just 6,000 years old was not sustainable—at least not among scientists. It did play a significant part in the Scopes “monkey trial” in the 1920s, however. In this case, a Tennessee schoolteacher was found guilty of teaching his students about evolution. Recent opinion polls in the United States suggest that in some American communities, Scopes might have a difficult time today.

Nott's arguments not only assumed a recent creation, however, but also involved the assumption of fixity of types. Living forms, in that view, had remained pretty much the same since the beginning. On that matter, and on the issue of inherent African inferiority, Nott, Glidden, and the Southern parsons were in general agreement.

The Heyday of "Scientific Racism"

Clearly most of these debates involved more theology than science, even if we make allowances for the popular meaning of "science" in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite great advances in scientific method and observation by that time, not to mention massive achievements in such fields as physics, mathematics, and geology, these genuine sciences shared the terrain with phrenology—the attempt to measure character and personality through studying contours of the head. Aside from a few of these false starts, however, scientific inquiry in the nineteenth century took much of its impetus from such Enlightenment values as empirical observation, measurement, and objective reasoning, and some were quick to apply these methods to the analysis of human difference.

Scholars generally had accepted the premise that the human mind resides in the brain rather than the heart or, as the Romans had believed, the liver. The brain, therefore, was of special interest in the scientific assessment of human difference. Despite the aura of science that surrounded these inquiries, many early studies of "racial" difference fell short of the standards of valid inductive or deductive scientific method. As we recall, the inductive method entails objective collection of data without preconceived assumptions. A deductive method would involve the collection of data in the attempt to disprove a hypothesis. In the nineteenth century, however, most researchers involved in the study of "racial" differences assumed at the outset that "races" differ substantially in their intelligence and in various other aspects of character. This belief clearly did not arise inductively from the dispassionate collection of data, free of preconceived notions. Conversely, there were few, if any, deductive attempts to *disprove* the assumption of inferiority by treating it as a hypothesis to be tested against relevant data. Generally the "research" on "race" was a matter of measuring more precisely the *degree* of these assumed differences and to identify their causes anatomically. As we have seen, the idea of African inferiority was not without its critics outside the scientific community. Nonetheless, it seems evident that the incentive to identify and record alleged differences was somewhat greater among those who started out with the conviction that such differences were indeed real and significant.

Why the Fuss?

By this time American slavery, though contentious, had long been deeply established in roughly half of the country. Given that situation, why, at this late juncture, did the search for scientific proof of "racial" inferiority suddenly warrant such energetic pursuit? One clear possibility is that a growing public consciousness of the atrocity of slavery produced the need to assert and "prove" inferiority as a justification for the practice. Debates over the injustices of slavery apparently provoked a greater requirement to substantiate profound "racial" differences.

One acknowledged American leader in this field of research was not a southerner, but a distinguished Philadelphian named Samuel George Morton. Morton's basic method was to measure the cranial capacity of skulls by filling them with mustard seeds and recording the quantity they held. Morton collected as many skulls as he could find, from as many parts of the world as possible. The skulls' origins were not always clear, nor were their methods of collection, but there can be little doubt that more than a few graves were desecrated in the process. Morton collected very few of the skulls himself, but enthusiasts elsewhere were happy to send him new specimens. Eventually, his collection grew to be the envy of colleagues who shared his interests.

Not surprisingly, Morton concluded that the cranial capacities of Africans, on average, were smaller than those of Europeans and "white" Americans. Perhaps more than any other researcher up to that time, Morton promoted the idea that intelligence correlates significantly with brain size, and that brain size differs among "races." Differences in achievement, therefore, were not simply results of differential opportunity and economic advantage, but were a matter of physical capacity. As we shall discuss, Morton's legacy has continued well into the twenty-first century.

As Stephen Jay Gould pointed out in his important book *The Mismeasure of Man*, Morton's method had some serious shortcomings.⁵⁵ For one thing, Morton was careless about controlling for sex among his specimens. It was no secret, even in Morton's time, that women tend to have smaller crania than men because their overall body size tends to be smaller. Nor has it ever been established that brain volume within the normal range of variation among modern humans has any direct correlation with intelligence capacity. If it did, elite colleges could admit students on the basis of their hat sizes. A classic counterexample is the case of the French philosopher Anatole France—indisputably a man of considerable intellect—whose cranial capacity was about 900 cubic centimeters (compared to the modern human average of around 1300).

It is almost disappointing to find that Morton did not come across as a vicious racist in his personal life. By all accounts, he was a quiet, polite,

almost self-effacing man who did not appear to seek the acclaim that his studies brought him. For the most part, he said little on the issue of African inferiority, preferring instead, apparently, to let his data speak for themselves. Unfortunately the data, such as they were, spoke volumes and gave much reinforcement to less restrained “white” supremacists.

The Festering Boil of Slavery

All of this academic discussion and research took place against a background of slavery in which hundreds of thousands of people existed in a state of extreme misery and oppression. Assertions of African inferiority served as ideology for slavery’s advocates and apologists, but these advocates and their opponents also engaged in more direct political action. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the abolitionist movement had become increasingly vocal, and slaveholders, on their part, had become both more defensive and more assertive. Yet issues of slavery and African inferiority were not entirely congruent. It would be difficult to find any pro-slavery voices who also argued for “racial” equality, but it was not necessarily the case that all abolitionists held such beliefs, either. To hate slavery was not necessarily to love Africans.

Many followed Jefferson in believing that the best solution for the problems that were bound to follow the end of slavery would be to establish separate communities for African Americans. The idea of segregation was a part of the mix from the outset, and many abolitionists took a more extreme position, advocating the transportation of freed slaves to Africa. The nation of Liberia was founded by such relocatees. Frederick Douglass, former slave and prominent political activist, strongly opposed such policies and split with his fellow abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison on the question of deportation. Even free African Americans in the North were divided on the issue.

Some abolitionists, however, opposed separatist policies altogether. Garrett Smith established communities consisting of “whites” and free African Americans in several localities in the Northeast. John Brown, who later achieved fame at Harper’s Ferry, lived in one such community with his family in North Elba, New York, near the present village of Lake Placid. These initiatives gave support to those who argued that integrated communities not only were feasible, but could thrive. Such demonstrations did little, however, to assuage the pro-slavery South.

Thomas Jefferson’s 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France had led to the question of whether slavery would be allowed in that vast region. Early in the nineteenth century, many of the northern states had abolished slavery within their borders. This accentuated regional differences

on the issue and heightened concerns about the balance of free versus slave states. Abolitionists feared that slavery might become established in the western territories, vastly extending its range. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 addressed this potential problem and established that slavery would not be allowed in any of the western territories except Missouri.

Meanwhile, more and more settlers from the United States were moving into Texas, which then was a part of Mexico. The Mexican government had not discouraged these settlers at first, since Texas had been a difficult frontier region, and the establishment of settled ranches seemed to offer the possibility of greater stability. Before long, however, the settlers themselves became a source of problems. One reason was the extension of slavery into Texas, and with it, the increasing agitation of the settlers for annexation by the United States.

In 1844, John C. Calhoun offered a bill in Congress calling for the United States to annex Texas as a slave state. The bill failed to pass in the Senate, but when James K. Polk ran for president, his platform included Texas annexation. In 1845, Congress annexed Texas through a joint resolution, and the term "manifest destiny" began to appear in the popular media. The ensuing war with Mexico from 1846 to 1848 resulted in the United States' acquisition of about half of Mexico's territory north of the Rio Grande from Texas to the Pacific Coast.

The extension of slavery was not a foregone conclusion, however. In 1846, Congress considered the Wilmot Proviso, which would have excluded slavery from any of the territories acquired from Mexico. The bill failed to pass, but it stirred fears of abolition among the southern states and in Texas. The Free Soil Party, though unsuccessful, made the exclusion of slavery in the territories a central feature of its platform.

Anti-slavery forces continued to gain energy. The Underground Railroad had been established by the 1830s, albeit on a relatively uncoordinated basis at first. The network of safe houses and contacts to help slaves escape to such northern cities as Boston and to Canada acquired the name "Underground Railroad" long after it had been operating. An ex-slave, Harriet Tubman—one of its strongest figures—was personally responsible for helping more than three hundred slaves escape, risking her life by returning to the south nineteen times. In an attempt to counteract these efforts, Congress passed The Fugitive Slave Law, which treated escaped slaves as property that must be returned to their "rightful owners," even from free states. Slave hunters stalked escaped slaves, and even free African Americans, in such cities as Boston and New York, kidnapping them under the protection of law.

This issue became still more inflammatory with the passage of the Compromise of 1850. In devising this compromise, Henry Clay proposed

that California, formerly a part of Mexico, be admitted to the Union as a free state, that slavery be abolished in the District of Columbia, and that Congress impose an even harsher version of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Compromise also provided that the remaining territories acquired from Mexico, if and when they eventually joined the Union as states, could choose to allow slavery or not according to their own constitutions. This choice effectively took Congress out of the decisions altogether.

The Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854 produced still greater tensions between pro- and anti-slavery forces. This act effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in the western territories except for Missouri, where slavery was already legal. The new act opened the Nebraska territory, including what would later become the states of Nebraska and Kansas, to settlers who would have the right to determine the legality of slavery through “popular sovereignty.” This opened a fierce struggle between both factions.

Anti-slavery groups received support from organizations based in New England, in particular. Pro-slavery “border ruffians” from Missouri came to Kansas in droves to harass and terrorize abolitionist sympathizers and disrupt the voting process. At one point they attacked the town of Lawrence. In retaliation, John Brown and his men killed some pro-slavery settlers at a place called Pottowatomie Creek. Little evidence suggests that the men Brown killed had been involved in the attack on Lawrence, but in attacking them, Brown made it clear that at least some abolitionists would fight back. “Bleeding Kansas” remained an arena of pro- and anti-slavery conflict until (and during) the Civil War.

The Fugitive Slave Law became still more incendiary as a national issue in 1857, when the Supreme Court ruled on the Dred Scott case. Scott, a slave, claimed his freedom on the grounds that he had entered territory (Illinois and Wisconsin, where he lived for several years) where slavery was prohibited. He cited the Compromise of 1850 as his legal basis. In its decision, the Court ruled that the Compromise was unconstitutional because it would unlawfully deprive slave owners of their property. The decision was widely criticized even at the time, and has come down to us as one of the worst Supreme Court rulings in the history of the United States.

All these factors helped to propel opposing factions on a collision course toward political breakdown. The contradictions between slavery and the ideals of liberty and equality were clear enough—uncomfortable, but undeniable, and in the minds of many, unconscionable. Despite self-justifying myths among slaveholders that slaves were content, and even that they required slavery for their own protection, the cruelties of slavery were evident to anyone who chose to recognize them. Northern revulsion toward slavery

only grew with the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which for many readers portrayed the cruelties of slavery more effectively through fiction than any essays, pamphlets, or sermons ever had. The Fugitive Slave Law's harsh demands that northerners help to return escaped slaves to their southern owners outraged many. The Underground Railroad continued to help a small but steady stream of slaves escape to Canada, although most of these fugitives escaped from the border states rather than from the deep South.

Pro-slavery groups, not content to maintain their stronghold in the South, continued to push for the extension of slavery into the western territories. In the United States Congress, pro-slavery Senator Preston Brooks of South Carolina attacked the abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts on the floor of the Senate, beating him unconscious with his walking stick and leaving him near death.

Like John Brown, some abolitionists met violence with violence, though probably less often than pro-slavery extremists. Brown continued his guerrilla actions after killing the "border ruffians" in Kansas. In 1859 he carried out a raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia that although unsuccessful, may have achieved his goal of bringing the struggles over slavery to a crisis and making the Civil War all but inevitable. Federal troops captured Brown, and the government put him to death, but the incident fed the fears of many southern slaveholders that abolitionist attacks would escalate.⁵⁶

Despite some revisionist history that would depict the Civil War as a conflict over "states' rights" or some other abstraction, we can have no doubt that the War was about slavery. And slavery was inextricable from debates and conflicts about "race." Unfortunately, however, although the war brought about the end of slavery, it did little to eradicate American racism. Even some abolitionists who abhorred slavery considered African Americans inferior, and many of them worked assiduously to send freed slaves back to Africa. By this time, racism had sunk its roots deep in American culture.

Racism and Native Americans

While African slavery was clearly about the exploitation of human labor, Euro-American attitudes toward Native Americans had more to do with the possession of territory. In both African and Native American cases, a central aspect of the issue was control of one resource or another. For African slaves, kidnapped and displaced from their homelands, labor was the only resource that anyone could take from them—that, and their children who would also produce labor. Native Americans, however, being the prior inhabitants of North America, had many more resources and, often, the ability to protect

themselves—at least for a while. With this in mind, we might consider some of the ways in which popular views toward Native Americans varied with time and place and examine some of the causes of these changes.

During the early years of contact, the Native American presence often commanded at least grudging respect from the outnumbered Europeans. Europeans in the sixteenth century had gunpowder and firearms, but the weapons of the day were relatively cumbersome—by no means a guarantee of success over the arrows and clubs of a far more numerous adversary having superior survival skills and intimate knowledge of the terrain. Moreover, many Native Americans quickly acquired guns of their own. Europeans also had other Europeans to worry about. In that context, such groups as the Hodenosaunee and Huron were important as allies and significant as enemies. Many Native groups understood this and used it to their advantage with shrewd diplomatic skill.⁵⁷

Yet this advantage varied with the times and events. After the Revolutionary War, following two and a half centuries of contact and interaction with Europeans, the Six Nations of the Hodenosaunee had lost most of their lands. During the war many of them, seeing unruly colonists as a greater threat to them than the Crown, had allied with the British. At the end, however, the British abandoned these former allies and left them to the mercies of the new American government. The Seneca knew George Washington, the new president, by the name “Town Destroyer.” After the war, some of the Six Nations people followed the Mohawk leader Joseph Brant to Canada, where they established a community on the Niagara Peninsula. Others fled to communities along the St. Lawrence River near the border. During the War of 1812, many in the American government were concerned that some of the Hodenosaunee might rejoin the British, but for the most part that did not occur. In the aftermath, when Native Americans in the Northeast had lost most of their resources, they became less relevant to most of the Euro-American public, even as objects of hostility.

In the Southeast, where groups such as the Cherokee still held a good deal of choice farmland after the Revolution, hostility was more acute. The state of Georgia’s legislature ruled that no “Indian” could testify in court, a measure that not only deprived Native American people of any legal recourse for whatever injuries they might suffer at the hands of “whites,” but severely hampered their defense against any charges brought against them. The legislature later closed a minute loophole by making it illegal for any “white” man to testify in court *on behalf* of an “Indian.”

Yet these measures failed to satisfy the settlers’ desire for Native lands. In the end, the final strategy was simply to remove the people and seize their property. President Andrew Jackson, who entered office representing

these southern interests, executed his "Removal" policy in the 1830s in direct defiance of a decision of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall.⁵⁸ As Jackson apparently said, "Mr. Marshall has made his decision. Now let him enforce it."

Public attitudes toward Native peoples in the South were complex. Like most of the Hadenosaunee, the Cherokee and others had also sided with the British during the Revolution. This certainly had to do with contrasts between colonists' persistent encroachment on Native lands and the British Crown's attempts to curtail this encroachment through the Royal Proclamation of 1763, as well as British efforts at diplomacy. It also had to do with the fact that some Native groups had offered refuge to runaway slaves. Yet some Cherokee and other Native peoples in the South had also owned slaves. Beyond such complexities, however, the driving factor in the "Removal" policy, known to history as the "Trail of Tears," was land and property. Some Cherokee had prosperous farms that were the envy of their "white" neighbors, with clapboard houses, orchards, and even picket fences. Thousands of these Native Americans from the Southeast traveled on foot to "Indian Territory," now Oklahoma, where their descendants remain today. Many died along the way.

The Civil War had profound impacts on many Native Americans in the western regions. The influx of settlers increased dramatically, and the army was now free to direct their attention to the "winning of the West." Local militias in many regions complemented the federal troops. In Colorado, a civilian volunteer militia under Colonel John Chivington (a minister, when not in uniform) attacked an unsuspecting, peaceful Cheyenne camp at a place called Sand Creek. At dawn in November 1864, he and his followers slaughtered hundreds of men, women, and children, despite their efforts to surrender. The leader of this group of Cheyenne was a man named Black Kettle, who, a few days earlier, had met with political leaders in Denver to work toward some means of peaceful coexistence.⁵⁹

The Cheyenne also suffered attacks by federal troops at the Washita River, and again, in the company of their Lakota allies, at the Little Big Horn River in 1876. George Armstrong Custer led both attacks. As we know, the results of the third attack differed markedly from those of the first two, and the combined Cheyenne and Lakota forces wiped out Custer and the Seventh Cavalry to a man, with the exception of a few Crow scouts.

The Little Big Horn, however, turned out to be a pyrrhic victory for the Cheyenne and Lakota. Any public opinion that might have sympathized with the Native Americans on the Plains all but evaporated. A few years later, the Lakota, confined to a reservation and suffering starvation and disease, sought refuge in a religious movement known as the Ghost Dance,

which promised a return to the old days.⁶⁰ On rumors that this movement signaled a pending uprising, the government sent troops to Pine Ridge, prompting Lakota bands to flee into the nearby badlands in the belief (quite reasonable, under the circumstances) that they were about to be slaughtered. In December 1891, after negotiating the surrender of a band of Minneconjou Lakota at a place called Wounded Knee, troops of the Seventh Cavalry opened fire and killed more than three hundred, including many women and children—some of whom fled more than a mile before troops chased them down and murdered them.⁶¹ Many of the troops received Congressional Medals of Honor for their actions in this episode. Only in the 1970s did the Lakota succeed in getting the government to change the monument at the site, which, until then, had referred to the action as the “*Battle of Wounded Knee*.”

Primitive Stages

Competition over resources was an obvious background to these struggles, one-sided as they were. As the nineteenth century ended, most reservations shrank as the resources within their boundaries became apparent. Intellectually, a model of “progress” in human affairs served to rationalize and justify many of these measures.

As we have seen, the eighteenth-century idea of progress through rational thought had been fundamental to the Enlightenment. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, the idea of progress through competition came to eclipse faith in progress through reason. Eventually, this perspective came to be known as “social Darwinism,” associated with the idea of the “survival of the fittest,” although the idea substantially predated Darwin’s major publications. In this view—which still prevails to varying degrees in many quarters—it was inevitable, and even desirable, that the strong should overcome and eliminate the weak. It is a basic premise of *laissez faire* economics, under whose auspices unbridled competition supposedly brings out the best and eliminates the worst. Transposed to the broader social realm, the implications for a powerful majority’s policies toward indigenous people were clear.

Nineteenth-century ideas of progress had other implications as well. Many social theorists saw progress in terms of social development; and some, such as Lewis Henry Morgan, even labeled distinct stages of social evolution ranging from varying levels of “savagery” through “barbarism” to civilization.⁶² Others, such as Herbert Spencer, merely assumed an inevitable process of change through time from simple to complex forms as a result of the dominance of those who were most inherently capable—the “fittest,” as it were. Spencer was opposed to social programs, ranging from assistance

for the poor to public education, and even public libraries, on the grounds that they inhibited free competition between the weak and the more capable.⁶³ All these thinkers assumed that progress was unidirectional and followed a consistent trajectory—a model that later scholars have referred to as “unilinear evolution.”

The notion of unilinear evolution rested on an assumption that the human mind works in pretty much the same way everywhere. At one level, such an assumption was not inconsistent with the view of Enlightenment scholars, who tended to see rational thought in absolute terms. The idea that rationality could take different, equivalent forms in different cultures would not have occurred to most scholars of the times. From an Enlightenment perspective, differences in thought in different social systems were essentially a matter of differential knowledge and experience, which implied that with more knowledge and careful reasoning, rational thought would eventually take all of humankind in the same direction. The view of unilinear evolutionists followed much the same general pattern. A basic presumption was that sooner or later, all humans would come to the same solutions. The obvious differences among societies merely indicated that some had traveled farther along the path of progress than others.

But these principles, when they incorporated the idea of progress through competition and stages of cultural evolution, had dire consequences for small indigenous populations in expansionist states. Such a philosophy all but ruled out the possibility that smaller, “exotic” societies were valid, viable entities with equivalent worth. The assumption was that such peoples had remained in lower stages of cultural evolution, and it was inevitable, therefore, that larger, more “advanced” societies should supplant these “primitive” forms. They were doomed anachronisms, reflections of an outmoded past. Individuals in these “primitive” societies might be able to make the transition to a more advanced way of life, but the societies as a whole, and their modes of existence, were doomed.

Some who had no sympathy for “savages” were happy enough to see them disappear. Others, who adopted what they considered a more humanitarian view, probably did at least as much harm in the long run. Neither would have advocated the continuance of indigenous societies as they were, but the “humanitarians” wanted to help them change. Generally, many felt, the older, more “traditional” members of these societies would probably be unable to adapt and should be allowed to die out. The children, however, were more susceptible to “constructive” influence—especially if they could be separated from their parents and grandparents.

Richard Henry Pratt, a retired military officer, carried out a pioneering effort at “Indian education” by founding the Carlisle Indian School. His

motto, which expressed the conviction that to save the child it was necessary to “kill the Indian,” has justifiably earned its place in history.⁶⁴ The suffering and frequent deaths of children in these schools has been well documented and discussed. Sometimes, as it happened, the school killed the child as well as “the Indian.”

With respect to the philosophy behind Pratt’s (and similar) efforts, one might argue that although harsh, it was not fundamentally racist. It sprang, after all, from the premise that Native American children were capable of education and refinement. Such an argument would seem to be dramatically different from the ideas of inherent African inferiority that prevailed during the same period. But if we look more closely at the nature of these boarding schools, other features are more disturbing. The curriculum was not what we might nowadays call preparation in the liberal arts. It emphasized comportment, humility, submission to Christian doctrine, and, most notoriously, beatings for speaking in native languages. The discipline also involved severe punishment, including beatings, for speaking to a child of the opposite sex. Faculty and staff also subjected many of these children to sexual abuse. Clearly, the purpose of these boarding schools was not to produce Native American doctors or lawyers, but to provide a supply of workers to fill menial jobs—not social and political leaders, but maids, janitors, and household servants.⁶⁵ This is not to say that no Native child benefited from the boarding school experience. Some of the children came from societies that were so damaged that they saw the schools as places of refuge, even as their main hope of survival.

* * *

Although the Civil War brought an end to legal slavery in the United States, racism, as we shall see in the next chapter, became even more virulent and encompassing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Voices rose to counter these trends—many of them belonging to respected scientists and other established scholars. But the process continued, and, in the public mind, many charlatans and outspoken bigots had far more appeal than less flamboyant, thoughtful scholars. African Americans and Native Americans continued to be targets, but the trend also swept in other populations—especially in the context of increased immigration.

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CHAPTER 6

From the Civil War to World War II

The Civil War ended formally in 1865, but conflict over the central issue underlying the war—racial oppression—continued long afterward through other means. It has never ended. The Emancipation Proclamation had freed slaves in the Rebel States by decree in 1863, long before the end of fighting, but in many respects the conflict had at least a century and a half to go. Racism continued to be the American social disease.

To frame the situation in the period following the Civil War, it is important to consider the nature of the political parties that grappled with each other at the time. We need to digress historically a bit and discuss ways in which the positions of the parties in modern times differ from what they were in the mid-nineteenth century. During the decades leading up to the war, the Republican Party—the “party of Lincoln,” as modern-day Republicans are fond of describing themselves in some contexts—was strong in the North and generally took an anti-slavery position. The Democrats, strong in the South, were pro-slavery before the war and adamantly in favor of segregation afterward.

These positions shifted in the twentieth century. In the Depression of the 1930s, Democrats under Franklin Delano Roosevelt enacted a range of social programs collectively known as the “New Deal” that assisted a broad spectrum of disadvantaged citizens, including African Americans—although recent studies have shown that African Americans did not benefit on a proportionate basis from these programs.¹ At the end of World War II, Democratic President Harry S Truman ended segregation in the military.

Truman took other steps to address civil rights violations in the South. He proposed legislation to make lynching a federal crime, to outlaw poll taxes, and to put a stop to segregation in public transportation. As Robert Norrell writes,

The white South responded hysterically to Truman’s civil rights commitments. The president was trying to “Harlemize” the whole country, Senator James Eastland of Mississippi declared. Having defeated every effort for

antilynching, anti-poll tax, and pro-FEPC legislation over the years, southerners in Congress killed Truman's civil rights bill.²

In response to Truman's civil rights policies, however, many Southern Democrats—the "Dixiecrats"—bolted to the Republican side.³ "Truman's civil rights program, one Dixiecrat pronounced, would 'reduce us to the status of a mongrel, inferior race, mixed in blood, our Anglo-Saxon heritage a mockery.'"⁴

This succession of events led to the Republican Party's gaining a stronghold in the South for the last half of the twentieth century and beyond, and to the Democratic Party's becoming more closely associated with civil rights—although still, perhaps, not to the extent that many modern Democrats would wish. President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 all but lost the South for the Democratic Party, as Johnson predicted that it would at the time. In short, the relative positions of the parties on issues with regard to "race" changed radically from the Civil War to the beginning of the twenty-first century, effectively reversing themselves.

At the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, Republicans typically have received about 10–15 percent of the African American vote nationally. The Democratic Party, which once supported slavery, has received roughly 80–90 percent.⁵ In 2005, Republican party representative Ken Mehlman attempted to "mend fences" with major African American organizations by acknowledging the "Southern strategy" that exploited "race," but this seemed to have little effect on voting results in the 2006 elections.

To return to the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, however, the Republicans who dominated Congress at the time were inclined to enact punitive measures toward the South and to take steps to safeguard the rights of newly emancipated slaves. To many southerners, these two goals were aspects of the same thing. The well-being of African Americans had long come to imply the disadvantage of "whites."

In March 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, generally known as the Freedmen's Bureau, with the intention of helping former slaves become established and earn a living. This Bureau infuriated many southern landholding interests who believed, correctly, that its policies served to undermine their absolute control of resources.

A month after the passage of this act, John Wilkes Booth, a southerner, assassinated President Lincoln, and, as a result, Vice President Andrew Johnson (a Democrat) became the president of the United States. Johnson had little sympathy for the aspirations of former slaves, and one of his first acts was to declare amnesty for all of those southerners who had participated

in the recent “rebellion.”⁶ This act of reconciliation might seem to have been an attempt to heal wounds, and in a certain sense it was—with regard to “white” southerners. Johnson’s sympathies did not extend to former slaves.

Congress, on the other hand, held different views. Besides creating the Freedmen’s Bureau, Congress in December 1865 appointed the “Joint Committee of Fifteen on Reconstruction” to help freedmen establish themselves as self-supporting farmers. In the same month, Congress also passed the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish and prohibit slavery throughout the country, making the principle of the Emancipation Proclamation a part of the Constitution. The states finally ratified the amendment at the end of July, 1868, three years after the Civil War had ended.

Reconstruction and Reaction

The first Civil Rights Act passed in April 1866. The central point of the act was to specify that all persons born in the United States except “Indians not paying taxes” were American citizens and therefore were entitled to equal treatment before the law. The clear intent of the act was to give African American males the vote. (Women’s suffrage would not pass until 1920.) President Andrew Johnson vetoed the Bill, but Congress overrode his veto. In June of that year, they also passed the Fourteenth Amendment, giving the principles of the Civil Rights Act the status of Constitutional law.

President Johnson vetoed a bill to continue the Freedmen’s Bureau, but again Congress overrode his veto. Eventually, Johnson’s persistent disagreements with Congress over African American rights would contribute to the growing sentiment for his impeachment.⁷

Congress had passed the Basic Reconstruction Act in 1865, dividing the former Confederacy into five military districts and setting the conditions under which rebellious southern states could re-enter the Union. The act required the states to set up conventions with delegates elected with the full participation of former slaves. The purpose of these conventions was to write state constitutions that could meet the approval of Congress. Among other things, this measure was intended to ensure that these state constitutions would provide for full African American representation in the voting process. It also required that the states ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, requiring equal treatment for all.⁸

Predictably, plantation owners, who had once dominated social and political life in the South, felt threatened and beleaguered. Many former slaves, on the other hand, became energized and politically active, and as a result of these measures, many African Americans won election to local, state, and national political offices in regions where elite “white” dominance had long been a foregone conclusion.⁹

Disgruntled and deposed elites in the South agitated for a return to the old social order. As former slaves sought employment, local employers attempted to impose a system of gang labor requiring that African American workers move from plantation to plantation to work on the basis of the owners' situational needs. With that arrangement, the workers would be at the mercy of employers, who tended to collude in setting compensation. The workers finally prevailed, managing instead to establish a system of sharecropping. Sharecropping did little to alleviate their poverty but did allow the workers to remain attached to particular plantations and share a part of the profits, however small.

The late 1860s and early 1870s saw numerous bitter struggles among political parties and factions. In 1869 Congress adopted the Fifteenth Amendment, which stated that the right to vote should not be abridged because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." A full century after this Amendment passed, however, the rights of African Americans to vote remained a battleground that produced many casualties. In the late nineteenth century, most of the southern states adopted "Black Codes," local laws that imposed rigid restrictions on the rights of former slaves.¹⁰ It was also in this time that the Ku Klux Klan, "Night Riders," and similar terrorist groups arose in most of the Southern states, attacking former slaves who had achieved any prosperity or who aspired to political power, as well as those "whites" who appeared to be their allies.¹¹

The Klan and other vigilante groups in various local versions carried out terrorist assaults throughout the South. Any African American who was involved in political activity was especially vulnerable to attack. Many had their homes burned, many suffered lashings, castration, and other mutilation, and many died at the hands of lynch mobs. According to some estimates, more than four hundred lynchings took place throughout the South from 1868 to 1871.¹² In many regions, exercising the legal right to vote required extraordinary courage and posed mortal danger.

African Americans were not the only victims of vigilantes and mob violence, although they were by far the most numerous targets. In 1871, authorities in Meridian, Mississippi arrested African Americans for making "incendiary speeches." When the accused appeared in court, a mob attacked and killed the two defendants and the "white" judge. Mobs then rioted in the town and killed thirty other African Americans.¹³ Though such events did not always involve as many casualties in one incident, they were common over many generations a full century after the end of the Civil War.

Part of the rationale many Southerners adopted for such actions drew on a posture of victimization. They had little inclination to accept the idea that the war, at its base, had been a result of the institution of slavery and

the concerted attempts of pro-slavery interests to extend it into other states and territories. The rhetoric, instead, claimed the defense of local or regional freedom and “states’ rights” in opposition to an oppressive federal government. One southern politician grumbled that the South under federal troops was “becoming a Negro.”¹⁴

Southern sentiment fostered a concoction of images, the foremost being the idea of doomed, heroic gallantry in battling for a “lost cause”—the defense of an idyllic antebellum way of life.¹⁵ The notion of African American savagery and freed slaves’ alleged lust for “white” women gave an emotional frenzy to many Klan attacks and other mob actions. In the 1868 elections, the Democrats’ Vice Presidential candidate, Frank Blair, exploited this image. Although Blair was a Montanan, not a Southerner, he was an unabashed “white” supremacist. In one speech he accused his opponents, the Republicans, of wanting to subject the South to “a semi-barbarous race of blacks” who, he warned, would “subject the white women to their unbridled lust.”¹⁶

The irony of this assertion was deep and vicious. Throughout the history of slavery, plantation owners had felt entitled to force sex on slave women. Many of these women had faced severe beatings, or worse, for resistance. Owners sometimes forced the women’s husbands to go out and work in the fields while they victimized their wives.

Exacerbating the lurid paranoia of freed slaves lusting after “white” women and the image of futile heroism, many Southerners also nursed a sense of humiliation. When the Civil Rights Act allowed the election of African Americans to political office and other positions of power, hatred grew to new levels and drew on increasingly extreme premises. For anyone having even a vague recognition of the cruelties of slavery it was understandable, perhaps, to assume that the former victims might seek revenge. This, after all, was the view of Thomas Jefferson. No doubt it was often a matter of people’s projecting their own views onto others. Yet we have few examples of any such physical retaliation by former slaves—far less, in fact, than occurred in cases of rebellion while slavery still prevailed. After the war, a sweeter and more effective revenge, apparently, was to vote and participate in the political system.

Yet racism and paranoid fantasy grew to even more absurd levels. Perhaps the popular novelist Thomas Dixon Jr. expressed them most vividly. Dixon’s books *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman* glorified “white” supremacy and blamed slaves for the Civil War.¹⁷ Dixon perpetrated the image of the Klan as reluctant saviors whose honor demanded that they intervene as former slaves reverted to savagery with their unaccustomed freedom. Exempt from the discipline of slavery, in Dixon’s imaginary world they terrorized the land and threatened the flower of Southern womanhood. Dixon’s novel

The Clansman was the basis for D. W. Griffith's epic film *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915.

The End of Reconstruction and the Era of Jim Crow

Although the Republican candidate Ulysses S. Grant won the presidential election handily in 1868, significant shifts were occurring, and their cumulative effects appear to have been of almost seismic magnitude. While the pro-Southern anti-civil rights Democrats gained momentum and the Klan intimidated thousands of those they did not actually murder, many of the Republicans in the North grew softer in their positions. "Reconciliation" became an alternative to the policy of Reconstruction. As a consequence of northern Republicans' wish to mend fences with angry and aggrieved Southern interests who felt themselves victims of Northern oppression, civil rights for African Americans was one of the first issues that the conciliatory wing of the Republican Party began to ignore.¹⁸

In the midst of all this, scandals plagued Grant's presidency. He had won the office for a second time, but in the mid-term elections of his second term the Democrats won control of Congress in one of the most dramatic political upsets in American history. The stage was set for Democratic control of the federal government, and with it, the loss of whatever gains former slaves had made during Reconstruction.

Some powerful voices spoke in dissent, and one of the most eloquent critics was Frederick Douglass. This former slave had long been a distinguished figure among the "radical" anti-slavery, pro-Reconstruction Republicans. In Douglass's newspaper *The New National Era*, he wrote in 1871 that "the slave demon still rides the southern gale, and breathes out fire and wrath." He warned that everything the Civil War and subsequent struggles for rights had gained could be lost without continued vigilance. "The apparent powerlessness of the enemy makes us careless about the use of our strength."¹⁹

Douglass was prophetic, but he addressed an increasingly inattentive audience. The general desire among "white" Americans to put the "recent unpleasantness" behind them was part of it, and sympathy for the plight of African Americans was less acute among the general public than some might have hoped. While the "liberal" or "moderate" Republicans sought ways to unite the nation once again, Democrats in the South intensified their agitation, even to the extent of threatening a new civil war. Meanwhile, the Klan and other vigilantes continued their rampages, with little to stop them.

The decisive blow fell in the election of 1876. Samuel J. Tilden, the Democrats' candidate, was an immensely wealthy New Yorker. Though he

was not from the South, the southern Democrats evidently felt confident that he was sympathetic enough to their interests to warrant their support. Rutherford B. Hayes was the candidate of the moderate (or conciliatory) wing of the Republicans, which by this time dominated the party.

Voter fraud and intimidation abounded during the election, and an unknown number of Southern Republicans, mostly African Americans, were prevented from casting their votes. As the election came to a close, the results were inconclusive. Congress finally settled the matter by giving the decision to Hayes; but the resolution was not simply a matter of recounting votes. In order to gain the acquiescence of key members of Congress, Hayes and his supporters made deals that included the withdrawal of federal troops from the southern states. In effect, this compromise ended Reconstruction. The right of equal suffrage for African Americans was now subject to enforcement by the various Southern state authorities.

One is tempted to imagine the guffaws of politicians in the Deep South at this development, but such a semi-comic image seems profoundly inappropriate, considering the tragic consequences for millions of people. The arrangement opened the way for the era known as “Jim Crow”—an era that was to last tenaciously in many regions through the 1960s.

The term “Jim Crow” was associated with a pathetic, clownish minstrel character who appeared in many shows on the late nineteenth century. “Jim Crow” was ragged, churlish, and incompetent. Implicitly, he would have been a disaster if he had had any power. It is sadly interesting that such a caricature should have become representative of the African American image in the public’s mind, rather than the dignified example of the erudite Frederick Douglass or some other distinguished figure such as David Ruggles²⁰ or John Rusworm²¹—appalling, perhaps, but not surprising, considering the interests at stake. Even in the North, where African Americans competed with “white” European immigrants for jobs, a denial of “racial” differences would have offered very few direct benefits either for those in the Euro-American majority who held power, or those who strived to attain it.

Almost a century of “Jim Crow” laws affected the lives of at least four generations of African Americans. As time went on, the segregation of schools, shops, jobs, public transportation, and even access to drinking fountains would grow more rigid. In 1883 the Supreme Court effectively overruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875. The justices ruled that the principle of equal rights was a matter for state and local, rather than federal, enforcement. In 1896, in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Court upheld segregation in allowing “separate but equal” accommodations for African Americans.

Despite these victories for racism, little evidence suggests that Klan terrorist activities ended, even though the organization became less visible and

seems to have lost some of its energy during that period. Most of its wishes, after all, had come true. Yet the number of *officially recorded* lynchings reached an all-time high of 161 in 1892,²² and it would be naïve to assume that all such atrocities were duly recorded. On many occasions, in fact, local police and other officials were full participants.

During the first half of the twentieth century, when African American characters appeared in films, on the radio, and in the theater, their roles were generally clownish. In the South, meanwhile, where Klan and other racist mob activities persisted, Hayes's "compromise" had done nothing to bring peace to former slaves. On several occasions the House of Representatives passed bills that would have made lynching a federal crime. In each instance, they went down to defeat in the Senate.

Lynchings continued in the early 1920s, and if anything, they began to take on an even more sadistic character. Mobs burned victims alive in front of grinning audiences who in some cases, appeared to be happy to have their photographs taken. Some of these photos appeared on postcards, which were widely circulated. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, when the nation began to worry about the foreign conflicts that would eventually become World War II, the "Jim Crow" era persisted without serious challenge. Lynchings claimed an estimated five thousand victims from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s, the vast majority of them African Americans. Not all of them were, however. Catholics, Jews, Italians, and other European immigrants also died in this way. In one incident in New Orleans, a mob lynched eleven Sicilians.

It was evident that authorities in the southern states had little interest in ending these atrocities, most of which occurred in full public view. Law enforcement officers, many of them members of the Klan, often stood by and even participated. An estimated 1 percent of these lynchings resulted in prosecution. As Senator Mary Landrieu, Democrat of Louisiana, stated in 2005, children sometimes were let out of school to watch these spectacular atrocities, and railroad companies offered special excursions for the events.

These mob killings did provoke revulsion and horror in some quarters, however, particularly in the Northeast. It was apparent to many that the only way to curtail these murders was to override state responsibilities for prosecuting lynchings and to make them federal crimes subject to prosecution by the United States Attorney General. Congressional representatives offered more than two hundred bills to that effect between 1900 and 1950. Three of these passed in the House of Representatives, but as noted, all of them died in the Senate. In June 2005, the Senate finally passed a formal apology for its historic failure to act on this nightmarish aspect of American history. The measure passed with seventy-five votes out of one hundred.

Eight Senators, including Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, both from Mississippi, voted in opposition. The other twenty-two senators, for whatever reason, withheld their support of the apology through abstention or absence.

More than sixty years earlier, however, racist outrages in the South had already become an international embarrassment to the United States. In Scottsboro, Alabama, nine young African American men were convicted in 1931 in a perfunctory trial for allegedly raping two “white” women, and the judge sentenced them to death by hanging. The proceedings were so blatantly unfair that the story received national attention. The American Communist Party made the case an international issue and eventually succeeded in blocking their execution.²³

In the North as well as the South, the fear of competition for jobs also fueled racism against African Americans, although such factors are difficult to measure precisely. Perhaps as much as the myth of danger to “white” women, this economic issue reinforced the denial of equivalent education, promoted residential segregation, and produced many other forms of systematic exclusion. The older idea of deporting African Americans to West Africa, a fond dream of so many nineteenth-century abolitionists, no longer seemed feasible. Even Abraham Lincoln, who before the Civil War had once favored this measure as a “solution” to an intractable problem, foresaw the likelihood that African Americans, once free, would take jobs from “whites.” This fear certainly added energy to the ferocity of racism that many of the poorest “whites” came to display.

One might have hoped that those who occupied the most disadvantaged end of the spectrum, whether African American or “white,” might have found common cause, as they had in the 1600s. Times and perceptions had changed profoundly in two centuries since Bacon’s Rebellion, however, and intervening interests had worked successfully to forestall such coalitions. On a few occasions workers did try to unite as a “racially” inclusive force. The Knights of Labor in 1886 included almost 60,000 African Americans in their membership and almost as many women, but the organization dwindled after several unsuccessful strikes. In 1892, the Colored Farmers National Alliance and Cooperative Union combined with other alliances to form the Populist Party, which also was “racially” inclusive. The Democrats accused the party of “Negro domination,” however, and divisions among members soon intensified on “racial” lines.²⁴

In 1889, the “Mississippi Plan” marked a pioneering effort to create obstacles to African American voting through literacy requirements and the poll tax. Other southern states soon followed suit. On one notorious occasion, an African American man with a Ph.D. failed to pass the literacy test. While literacy tests erected insuperable obstacles based on impossible

requirements, the poll tax took advantage of poverty. A bill to counteract these measures and safeguard the rights of African Americans in 1890 failed in the Senate.²⁵

Fair labor practices and equal employment opportunities continued to be an issue up to the early years of World War II and beyond. In 1941, thousands of African Americans marched on Washington to protest unequal hiring and labor practices in the war industries, and in this case they achieved some results. President Roosevelt that year issued an executive order to create the Fair Employment Practices Committee. Yet "interracial" violence continued, now flaring up in regions far outside the old Confederate states. This was partly, at least, a consequence of a massive migration of African Americans to the North and West Coast in search of better conditions.²⁶ The "Zoot suit" riots (referring to a flamboyant style of men's suit) erupted in 1943 in Los Angeles among "white" sailors, African Americans, and Latinos, and similar clashes occurred in San Diego, Long Beach, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia.²⁷ Twenty-five people died in a "race riot" that year in Detroit, and later that summer, rioters killed six African Americans in New York City.

Native Americans

In that era racism took varying forms in the United States, and Native Americans continued to be targets. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, conflicts between Native Americans and federal troops on the Plains and in the Southwest had all but ended, and by the 1880s most of these Native groups were on reservations, where they posed little competition for employment. Job opportunities would continue to be scarce for them well into the twenty-first century, when unemployment rates on reservations have often exceeded 70 percent.²⁸ Few of these communities show major signs of improvement even today,²⁹ although income from casinos seems to offer hope for some.

The main challenge to people in reservation communities was simple survival, by whatever means available to them. Usually, the main option was farming. In nineteenth-century American popular thought, the family farm epitomized the ideal foundation of the "good society," and to some policy makers, farming was the means to bring about "civilization" for Native American peoples. Ideally, it would wean them from their unacceptable "traditional" ways of life—and change they must, in the view of most.

Since military conflicts had ended, few of the American public would still have endorsed the genocidal policies that some had once advocated. Yet in the late nineteenth century still fewer, probably, would have accepted the

idea that Native Americans should be free to determine their own ways of life.³⁰ Hunting was no longer a feasible survival strategy, since they had lost access to most of their former resource base. Nor were many other means available to them except for government rations, which were notoriously unreliable, inadequate, and subject to the chicanery of corrupt reservation administrators.³¹

In almost all cases, reservations were on lands that had had little or no apparent value when the government first drew their boundaries. When it turned out that some of these areas did have unforeseen resources, the government often simply appropriated the valuable sections and placed them in the public domain. The Lakota Pine Ridge reservation, for example, initially included the Black Hills. But when prospectors discovered gold there, Congress opened that region for public exploitation. The San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona once included large areas that turned out to be rich in copper ore. When the worth of these lands became apparent, however, President Grant placed them in the public domain by Executive Order. Within a few years, copper smelters worked busily on former reservation lands, with a non-Apache labor force. This appropriation of Native American resources has been so well documented that for our purposes, these few examples can suffice to convey the broader picture.³² With regard to social, cultural, and “racial” issues, however, the historical and regional trends have been more complex in certain respects.

Where “white” settlements grew up near reservations, relationships between surrounding communities and Native Americans often involved vitriolic racism, in some cases lasting until the present. Even in the 1970s, Apache people from San Carlos often had trouble being waited on in stores in the nearby mining town of Globe. In Wisconsin, sports fishing interests in the 1980s fomented bitter conflict over Anishinabek (Chippewa) treaty rights to spear walleyed pike, and the conflict heated to the point at which bumper stickers could appear saying “Save a walleye—spear a pregnant squaw.”

After the late nineteenth century, however, Native Americans in general became less relevant to most of the public who lived far from their communities. They no longer possessed most of their former resources, and they posed little threat, real or imagined, to anyone. And, in contrast to popular images of African Americans, a considerable audience grew to accept a romanticized view of Native American peoples. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Song of Hiawatha” in the nineteenth century conveyed an image of pristine and heroic purity and virtue.³³ (In this sense, did it matter that Longfellow used a legendary Mohawk character in an Anishinabek setting?). Numerous popular novels and other literature, most

of which have not achieved the posterity of Longfellow's work, also portrayed versions of a "Noble Red Man."

At the same time, a variant form of this romantic nostalgia, based on a considerable degree of fantasy, took on the poignant theme of "the dying Indian." Perhaps James Fraser's popular bronze sculpture titled "The End of the Trail," produced early in the twentieth century, captures this most vividly. The work depicts a Native American man on horseback descending a rocky slope, his head hanging sadly, and his lance drooping.³⁴

This general theme guided much social policy. Few in the American public doubted that Native American societies were doomed to extinction, whether sooner or later. While some of the most hostile onlookers would have been content to let them die out, more "humanitarian" minds remained determined to "help them change." Missionaries took administrative positions on reservations to promote "education." Government authorities took children from their families and sent them to distant boarding schools, often by force.³⁵ Reservation officials encouraged Native Americans to adopt the respectable, if often impoverished, lives of peaceful farmers. The sincere hope among many of these policy makers was to convert as many Native Americans as they could into citizens that the general society could incorporate. They would disappear—not through genocide, but through immersion in the indistinguishable masses of society.

These initiatives, which many refer to as "assimilationist" policies, were not designed to produce professional or political leaders. A few Native Americans in the nineteenth century, such as the distinguished Seneca Ely Parker, did succeed in such roles.³⁶ But for the vast majority, the entry point into the broader society was to be at the level of menial labor. At the Carlisle Indian School, students did not return to their homes and families during the summer recess, but worked as servants in the homes of wealthy "whites." Alice Littlefield has shown a clear correlation, in fact, between the national labor supply and federal investment in "Indian schools." In periods of labor surplus, funding for these schools declined, while funding increased during times of labor shortage.³⁷

In the mid-1880s, Congress decided to take action to accelerate the process of assimilation in reservation communities. Their investigations showed that in most of these communities, Native Americans had not progressed very far along the road to civilization. They were still "acting like Indians"—speaking in their own languages, recognizing their own systems of kinship and the social obligations these entailed, and sometimes, despite the best (or most strenuous) efforts of missionaries, maintaining their own traditional beliefs. They were not blending in. Clearly, some additional measures were necessary.

One man with a solution was Henry Dawes, long known as a “friend to the Indians.” Dawes argued that a major reason for Native Americans’ failure to advance was their persistence in maintaining shared, corporate land holdings. In the perspective of many at the time, private property was the hallmark of civilization. In his book *Ancient Society*, Lewis Henry Morgan had placed great emphasis on the transition from collective to private ownership as an aspect of social evolution. Writing with a mid-nineteenth century point of view, Morgan even associated the appearance of private property with an increase in brain size.³⁸

A consequence of these discussions was the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1886, which divided reservations into private holdings allotted to individual heads of families. Typically, this division accounted for only a portion of total reservation lands. The remainder went up for sale to the public.³⁹ The Dawes Act not only reduced the size of reservations, but in many cases, it eventually resulted in the loss of allocated lands as well. The Allotment Act gave title to lands in “fee simple”—that is, with rights to private ownership, including the right to sell.⁴⁰

The Supreme Court had earlier designated Native Americans as “wards” of the government,⁴¹ and federal officials took an ambivalent position regarding their competence to conduct their own affairs. Federal oversight, supposedly benign, if paternalistic, meant that if the appropriate government official judged a Native American “competent,” he would be allowed to sell his land allotment. Since this act affected reservation communities in which many families were destitute, many people chose to do so.

“Half-breeds”—people with mixed Native and European heritage—were more likely to acquire certification of competence than “full-bloods.” (In many cases the actual parentage of such individuals was less important in designating them as “full-blood” than their demeanor, behavior, and perceived motivation.) The Native American seller would not necessarily receive the payment directly, however. A government official would hold the payment “in trust,” as a parent might for a child.

For “full-bloods,” the question of competence to make such important decisions about their property and their status as “wards” of the government gave Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials powerful discretion over their lives. Whatever the outcome of individual cases, thousands of Native Americans lost ownership of lands they had once held in common. Many reservations became riddled patchworks of land parcels under Native American and non-Native ownership. As generations passed and children inherited family lands, parcels became smaller and more scattered as a result of subdivision among the heirs; this situation continued until many people,

with no contiguous plots large enough to be of any use, had little choice but to lease or sell them.

Eventually, the disastrous consequences of the Dawes Act became apparent and the allotments ceased. By this time, however, the damage had been done on many reservations and remains a problem to this day.

World War I had a major impact on Native American affairs. Many enlisted in the military and distinguished themselves in service, often in combat. In the aftermath of the war, this service came to the attention of members of Congress, many of whom showed a renewed interest in Native American affairs. In the 1920s, Congress decreed that Native Americans now were citizens of the United States, with voting rights.⁴² This decree did not sit well with many Native Americans, who felt that they had enlisted to fight the war as allies, not as "American citizens." Many felt that they already belonged to their own independent indigenous nations.⁴³

A second result of this renewed interest, however, was a government-commissioned study by the Brookings Institution examining the conditions of reservation life.⁴⁴ The results, published in 1928 in what came to be known as the "Meriam Report," were appalling to many who were not already familiar with the situation. Inadequate housing, poor educational opportunities, lack of employment, poor nutrition, and a range of other ills associated with abject poverty marked life on most reservations.

Soon after the report appeared, the United States found itself confronting the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the midst of widespread unemployment, agitation by labor unions, vicious Jim Crow repression in the South, and a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, the Roosevelt administration changed the federal government's position on Native Americans.

Many other constituencies were far more numerous and powerful. Native Americans constituted only about one per cent of the population of the United States. Yet, as George Pierre Castile points out, Native Americans also offered a "demonstration" opportunity for the government to show that it had a humane side.⁴⁵ John Collier, the newly appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, engineered and implemented a new federal policy with regard to reservation communities.

Collier remains a controversial figure. His stance of sympathy and respect for Native Americans coincided with policies that often were heavy-handed. He determined, for example, that the Navajo sheep herds were overgrazing the arid lands of the reservation and compelled the Navajo to reduce their stock drastically. For people who had little security except for their herds, the killing of large numbers of animals remained a bitter memory at least until the 1970s, when elderly people who had been alive at the time still remembered the stock reduction with bitterness.

Collier also pushed the Indian Reorganization Act, passed in 1934, which required reservation communities to elect tribal councils that would link their governance systems at the local level to the federal government.⁴⁶ A federal official, the reservation Superintendent, was to meet regularly with the tribal council and offer guidance. He (almost always a man) also had considerable executive power over tribal affairs. Some communities accepted this requirement, but others, feeling that they already had their own long-standing systems of governance, resisted. According to one reservation resident,

The white agent was retained in the form of the *superintendent*, a white B. I. A. appointee who holds veto power over tribal finances . . . There was no system of checks and balances, no procedure through which inequities could be righted. It was a blueprint for elected tyranny.⁴⁷

Many communities divided on the issue, with “traditionalists” who opposed the election of a tribal council refusing to vote for council candidates. These non-votes, of course, had no weight in the election tallies. Generally the federal government accepted the results of such elections, even when only a small percentage of eligible voters—in one case, fewer than 10 percent—participated.

Under Collier’s administration the Indian Reorganization Act was thus a mixed bag for Native Americans. Collier’s policies did, however, mark a departure from old assumptions that Native American societies were remnants of a past evolutionary stage and were bound to disappear. After more than three centuries of Euro American contact, it had become clear to most people that Native Americans were not about to disappear any time soon. Most Native populations, in fact, had been growing. They were obviously a permanent part of the American scene. Collier also took steps to regain some of the lands that reservation communities had lost through numerous instances of chicanery.

Yet a sense of Native Americans as less than fully “adult” persisted, at least in a legal sense, and the BIA retained its role as paternalistic trustee of Native American resources. Assimilationist policies also intensified after Collier left office, especially in the 1950s,⁴⁸ though by the late 1960s they generally became somewhat less draconian in their implementation than they had been in the past.

The historic experiences of Native Americans and African Americans offer interesting contrasts, as well as parallels. Many Native American communities strived to keep their societies intact within the American state, but distinct from it, and to keep possession of what was left of their resources. African Americans, having long since been wrested from their original communities and resources, strived to claim their rightful place in the society

they had helped to build. Both faced powerful interests for whom their equality—either as individuals or as entire communities—was not acceptable. They also faced humanitarian “friends” whose policies—deportation to Africa for freed slaves, and assimilationist policies for Native Americans—were questionable forms of assistance at best, and often did more harm than good.⁴⁹

“Nordics” Rampant: Racism Directed at Europeans

While most of the discussion so far has focused on racism directed specifically at Africans and Native Americans, racism became far more extensive in its targets. Ultimately, racism is not necessarily about specific victims or groups. To assume so might imply that certain characteristics of these targets somehow account for their oppression. Racism is about exclusion, and the identities of the excluded have often changed with the times. The operative factor is at the originating end of the relationship—the racists themselves.

We know that inter-group divisions, and even hostility, are ancient aspects of the human experience, whatever criteria people may have used as rationales for setting and defining these boundaries. But once the idea of biological “race” took hold in Western Europe and North America a few centuries ago, it became a useful weapon that was capable of application in many directions, and adherents of racism have adapted to the prevalent ideas of their times.

In the eighteenth century, as we have seen, many ideas about population difference summoned either the framework of Biblical creationism or extreme theories of environmental causation, or some combination of both. The Enlightenment ideal of scientific observation or rational thought lent a patina of objectivity to many of these speculations, and the emphasis on empirical data fostered a fascination with measurement. In the nineteenth century, such people as Samuel George Morton presented “scientific evidence” of inferiority based on cranial capacities and skull configurations.⁵⁰

By the end of that century, a relatively narrow idea of hereditary biology had captured many racists’ imaginations. This version of folk biology was not much concerned with Darwinian views of evolution, which would have meant accepting the uncomfortable idea that species had undergone long-term changes and transformation. On the contrary, these theorists assumed the *immutability* of inherited characteristics, at least in the short term. Most insidiously, perhaps, these allegedly inherited traits included not only physical features, but such things as moral character, mentality, temperament, intellect, or even a propensity for poverty. Such theories reached far beyond African Americans and Native Americans

The great increase in immigration from Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an important backdrop to these discussions. Most of the earliest European immigrants to North America, except for the Spanish, had come from Northwestern Europe. And although the French and Dutch colonized parts of what later became the United States, with sizeable pockets of Swedes, Germans, and other Western Europeans established here and there, most of the earliest immigrants in what is now the United States spoke some dialect of English as their first, and usually their only, language.

The demographics of this situation altered somewhat during the next century or so. In 1846 and 1847 a potato famine in Ireland caused massive starvation, and by 1860, refugees from Ireland increased the existing Irish-American population by almost one and a half million.⁵¹ Other events and processes early in the twentieth century added still more complexity to the population. The flow of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe between 1900 and 1914 swelled to more than a million per year. The author's maternal grandparents, from what is now Romania, were among them.

Some, like the author's grandmother, came for better economic opportunities, and they willingly worked as maids or laborers for established families—often those who themselves had immigrated earlier. Many others, like my grandfather, came to escape the military service that his father had experienced—in his case, conscription into the Hussars of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose term of service was twenty years.

This influx of immigrants raised concerns among established elites in the United States. Many fretted that these foreigners would diminish the quality of American society, and, through admixture, sully the American populace in general. These worries, and the rhetoric they generated, centered on premises about differences among the regional, linguistic, cultural, and national populations of Europe. Calls for exclusion often employed the term “races,” and sometimes, “stocks.”

Attempts to differentiate European populations by reference to stereotypical characteristics, of course, had a long history. Early environmental determinists such as Montesquieu had attributed differences in temperament to climate, asserting that warm southern environments produced strong sexual passions, but not bravery. Cold northern climates produced vigor and courage but weak sexual desires and a tendency toward drunkenness.⁵² Whatever issue one might wish to take with such imputations, these alleged characteristics, in Montesquieu's view, had resulted from exposure to particular environments. They were *acquired*, not intrinsic to these populations. Early twentieth-century discussions of stocks and “races,” however,

were very much about *immutable* traits that supposedly were impervious to environmental influence.

The use of the term "stock" is interesting, since it is associated with animal breeding (as in "livestock"). As we know, animal husbandry often involves selective breeding to proliferate hereditary traits—a cow that gives more milk, for example, or a dog with an especially good sense of smell. The use of the term "stock" with regard to humans thus carried weighty implications about inherited characteristics and qualities. And lest we forget, another side of selective breeding is to avoid or prevent mating that might produce inferior offspring.

The identification of these "races" or stocks within Europe has a complex and varied history. One of the earlier terms that came into popular usage in this sense was "Aryan." The original meaning of this term had a linguistic basis, referring to the population of Indo-European speakers who had invaded India from the north some time around 1500 B.C.E.⁵³ The term quickly gained popularity in some academic circles, however, as a label for "white" populations. Yet many felt the need for more complex or precise taxonomy. In the eighteenth century, Blumenbach had used the term "Caucasian" in reference to inhabitants of the region in or near the Caucasus Mountains just north of the Black Sea, whom he believed were the most beautiful human population.⁵⁴ Blumenbach suggested that this "Caucasian" population represented the best living approximation of the original human prototype, from whom other populations had departed or degenerated.⁵⁵

For some reason, the term "Caucasian" has persisted to the present as a "racial" label, even becoming a standard category in official documents as a synonym for "white." One can only speculate why that was the case. Perhaps it is because the use of a term from a southeastern corner of Europe to include all Europeans and their offspring makes so little sense that the term was sufficiently devoid of meaning to appear scientifically neutral.

The term "Aryan" fell out of favor for a time, only to reappear later in Nazi doctrine during the 1930s in Germany, and among neo-Nazi hate groups in the United States decades later. It is still with us, therefore, and has acquired a far more odious sense than it had to begin with. (We shall discuss the "Aryan Nation" and related hate groups in the United States in the Chapter 7.)

Early in the twentieth century, however, with renewed interest in identifying regional subdivisions among Europeans, the term "Aryan" was not specific enough for many. Some writers saw critical differences between northern stocks, or "Nordics," and peoples of eastern and southern Europe. One major proponent of the term "Nordic" was Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who left his native England and moved to Germany early in

the twentieth century, married the daughter of the composer Richard Wagner, and became an apologist for Nazism.⁵⁶

The American writer Madison Grant devised a more elaborate taxonomy. In his popular and influential book *The Passing of the Great Race*,⁵⁷ Grant proposed the terms “Alpine” and “Mediterranean” to differentiate “Nordics” from such European peoples as Slavs, Greeks, and Italians. Grant saw the “Alpine race” as “submissive to authority” but with a “tendency toward democracy,” though it is not clear that in Grant’s view, such an inclination was necessarily a good thing. The “Mediterranean race” suffered a range of moral and physical weaknesses. Grant describes the “Nordic race,” on the other hand, in heroic terms. Not only did “Nordics” have the qualities of “soldiers, sailors, adventurers, and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers, and aristocrats. . . .”⁵⁸

Some might wonder how this assessment could square with such historical events as the Italian Renaissance, Columbus’s discovery of the New World, or other such anomalies that seem to have been non-“Nordic” accomplishments. But the well-known American scientist Henry Fairfield Osborn, Grant’s ardent supporter, sprang to resolve the matter. In a letter to the *New York Times* in 1924, Osborn asserted that most, if not all, great figures in Italian history had, in fact, been Nordics. “Through the Nordic tide which plowed into Italy came the ancestors” of figures ranging from Petrarch to Leonardo da Vinci. Not only that, but “Columbus from his portraits and from busts, authentic or not, was clearly of Nordic ancestry.”⁵⁹

These writings were far more than a paean to “Nordic” superiority, however. An underlying theme, as we can discern from Grant’s title *The Passing of the Great Race*, was a sense that inferior stocks posed a threat to the better elements of the population, and hence to the society as a whole. As superior as the self-styled “Nordics” felt themselves—“natural rulers,” and all of that—the “Nordic” supremacists tried to make the case that they were about to be overwhelmed by an influx of lesser beings—Jews, Italians, Slavs, and the like.

How was this supposed to happen? Surely it would not be a matter of overt confrontation, although in the minds of some, that was not entirely out of the question. The primary concern of “Nordic” supremacists was the problem of dilution. The genetic influx of inferior “races,” they feared, would water down the quality of solid “Nordic” stock. This miscegenation would produce future generations who would no longer be up to the standards of their forebears. While earlier racists’ nightmares were of African Americans’ raping their women, this generation’s prime dread seems to have been seduction.

The books of these “Nordic” proponents elaborated on the details of their fears more fully, but a sample of their titles alone suffices to capture

the thrust of their concerns. We have Grant's book predicting the demise of the "Great Race." Lothrop Stoddard's title *The Rising Tide of Color*⁶⁰ says it all. William MacDougall's book *Is America Safe for Democracy?*⁶¹ raises serious doubts about the pernicious presence of recently arrived hoi polloi, not to mention voting rights for "colored men." Thurman Rice, a bacteriologist at Indiana University, expressed this point of view concisely in 1929.

We formerly received practically all of our immigrants from northern Europe. They were for the most part of an excellent type and would blend well together . . . [but] most of the recent immigrants . . . have come from eastern and southern Europe, and from other lands even less closely related; they do not mix with our stock in the "melting pot," and if they do cross with us their dominant traits submerge our native recessive traits. . . .⁶²

But apparently, this unhealthy mixing was not the only problem. Rice grumbled that "they are often radicals and anarchists causing no end of trouble; they have very low standards of living; they disturb the labor problems of the day; they are tremendously prolific."⁶³ All that and sexy too? Jonathan Marks notes that in a review of Rice's book in the *Journal of Heredity*, the reviewer pronounced it "really excellent."⁶⁴

These were only a few of the most influential books on the subject in the early twentieth century. Opinion was not unanimous on the matter, however. One of the most influential voices against racism, both in academic circles and in public forums, was the anthropologist Franz Boas, the first Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. As we saw in Chapter 2, Boas, a Jew, had arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth century. On the basis of his field work and other research, Boas mounted strong arguments against inherent racial inferiority. Among his students were Melville Herskovits, whose studies challenged the claim that slaves in North America had lost all remnants of African culture,⁶⁵ and Zora Neale Hurston, an African American who was a significant figure in the Harlem Renaissance.⁶⁶ As we saw in Chapter 2, as early as 1912, Boas presented evidence on skull shapes of European immigrants to challenge decisively the idea of fixity of type.⁶⁷

Yet in the years after Boas published his findings, not surprisingly, "Nordic" supremacists tried to discredit his work when they could not ignore it. Harvard geneticist Edward M. East insisted that "great gaps separate the races," and in an apparent oblique reference to Boas, added that "Today the Jews retaliate by proclaiming the Nordic race is a myth." Dr. Ellsworth Huntington scoffed at Boas and his students as "a relatively small group of scientific men, especially those who belong to races that are not dominant,

and a rather large group of persons with strong philanthropic tendencies.”⁶⁸ (Ouch!)

It seems indisputable that during the first decades of the twentieth century, the dominant perspective in United States was racist, and in the view of many, Jews, Italians, and other southern and eastern Europeans were not quite “white.” The movie industry, though in some ways a refuge for a few Jewish immigrants, still relegated African Americans to clownish roles. Asians were likely to be “inscrutable” eccentrics or sinister villains. The Harlem Renaissance, offering a base for the likes of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, remained a relatively isolated phenomenon whose impact on American culture was probably greater many decades later, in retrospect, than it was at the time.

When the United States entered World War I, German Americans also became targets of animosity. Many changed their names in attempts to avoid persecution. A German-American man was lynched in St. Louis. In the same era, the Russian Revolution fanned fears of “Bolshevism” in the United States, and in the 1920s, Congress passed the Johnson Act, limiting immigration. Proponents of the bill relied heavily on arguments of biological inferiority. Jonathan Marks notes that

The effect of the Johnson bill was to cut back immigration of peoples from central, southern, and eastern Europe. Over the next decade this had the deeper effect of preventing the escape of many people who were ultimately exterminated by the Nazis in their eugenic fervor.⁶⁹

Indeed, American and British arguments that “racially” inferior “stocks” posed a threat found nodding approval in some quarters in Germany. Hitler apparently read a German translation of Grant’s *Passing of the Great Race*, including Grant’s assertion that “The laws of nature require the obliteration of the unfit.”⁷⁰ Hitler wrote a letter of praise to Grant and referred to *The Passing* as “his bible.”⁷¹

In the 1920s, the “Palmer Raids” rounded up hundreds of Eastern European immigrants—a preview of the McCarthy era of the 1950s and the Patriot Act of the early twenty-first century⁷² (see Chapter 7). Many of these actions also drew their energy from a general fear of “pollution”—an idea that “racial purity” was in danger of being sullied by undesirable foreign matter.

Intelligence Testing

Part of the construction of a scientific rationale for social discrimination involved standardized tests for intelligence. In some ways this was reminiscent

of pre-Civil War studies fraudulently claiming that free African Americans in the northeast suffered from a much higher frequency of insanity than those who remained enslaved in the South. Africans, it seemed, could not cope with freedom. In the early twentieth century, proponents of African American racial inferiority welcomed supposedly scientific evidence from formal intelligence tests to bolster their position.

From a historic perspective, the use of these tests to support arguments for genetic limitations on intelligence was a perversion of their original intent. Alfred Binet, the French psychologist who invented the test, believed that intelligence (which he struggled to define) was subject to environmental and experiential influences.⁷³ Binet considered intelligence to be multifaceted, involving judgment as well as quickness in solving problems. His purpose in devising the test was to identify school children who required extra attention and assistance to catch up with other children of their age.

In the United States, however, the hereditarian H. H. Goddard saw the test as a means of demonstrating "white" supremacy.⁷⁴ Dismissing Binet's recognition that nongenetic factors affect intellectual performance, Goddard, in keeping with the hereditarian article of faith that even such traits as moral character were matters of biological heritage, assumed that the tests documented hereditary differences. Lewis Terman of Stanford University translated Binet's test into English and adopted it for use in the United States, producing what became the Stanford-Binet test that millions of schoolchildren and military forces were required to take.⁷⁵

The tests produced some interesting results. In World War I, they showed that as a whole, African Americans had lower scores than "white" Americans. Eugenists and other racists had no problems attributing this to inherent "racial" differences in intelligence capacity rather than allowing for the possibility that poverty, poor schools, and other life experiences might have contributed to the result. But the test results showed some anomalies. It turned out, for example, that on the average, African Americans in the North scored higher than "white" southerners.⁷⁶

What could one make of this? It would be awkward for the researchers to attribute these test scores to the poor quality of southern schools. That might open the door to a similar argument with regard to African American schools, which at that time were separate, but hardly equal. A few deep thinkers came up with the explanation that African Americans in the North had more "white blood" in their ancestry, which provided them with greater intelligence.

But this was a bit lame. For one thing, it flew in the face of other alarmist views about the lack of viability among "interracial hybrids." Many had argued against "inter-racial" marriage on the grounds that the "hybrid"

children of such relations were less “fit,” and many states even outlawed such marriages. Nor did it make much sense to argue that African Americans in the North had more “white” blood than the supposedly pure “whites” in the South who did so poorly in the tests. Surely these southern “whites” had even *more* “white” blood than the African Americans, who just had *some* “white” blood. I.Q. proponents did their best to ignore this anomaly, as well as the annoying critics who occasionally brought it up.

Eugenics

These hereditarian perspectives converged in a movement to which Sir Francis Galton, distinguished statistician and cousin of Charles Darwin, gave the name “eugenics,” based on a Greek term meaning something like “good breeding.”⁷⁷ The general idea was to improve society, or at least to ward off social degeneracy, by promoting a higher birth rate among the most “fit.” The other side of this particular coin, of course, was that those who were *less* fit should have fewer offspring. People the proponents of eugenics considered less fit, not surprisingly, often tended to be those least like themselves. Eugenics, Galton asserted, would give “the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable.”⁷⁸

The array of symptoms denoting a lack of “fitness” varied, but eugenicists’ lists often included such things as “feeble-mindedness,” criminality of various sorts, and in some cases, a proclivity for poverty.⁷⁹ Eugenicists considered all of these characteristics, and more, to be inherited biologically. To be sure, poverty very often *is* inherited. So is wealth—although this need have little to do with the biological “fitness” of the heirs.

We can see at least three major assumptions at work in the eugenics movement. Certainly, eugenicists subscribed to a far more inclusive biological determinism than most biologists would accept today. This was consistent with common claims among “Nordic” supremacists that alleged qualities of character, propensities, and abilities of the various “stocks” were immutable and impervious to environmental influence or differential experience. To admit otherwise would run the danger of having to concede that alleviating the conditions of poverty might improve such character flaws as criminal behavior.

The eugenicist view of things also assumed a hierarchy of quality among different “races” or stocks. There was no doubt in their minds about which stock had the highest quality, but they left room for some discussion about the relative ranking of others further down the scale.

The third major element in this perspective was the idea that these inferior groups posed a threat to those at the top. While outright overthrow

by the inferior masses might be unlikely, lower segments of society did seem to have a propensity for unruly, undisciplined behavior. At any rate, their mere presence lowered the overall quality of the nation; and if, God forbid, they should interbreed to any extent with the more "fit" elements of society, their deleterious effects would become even more profound. It seems that the eugenics movement rested on an odd mix of extreme biological determinism, bigotry, and in a social, nonclinical sense, paranoia.

Social problems did abound in American society. With recent immigrants packed into cities and typically concentrated in ethnic neighborhoods, many of them did live in conditions of squalor. Many could speak little or no English. Unable to find lucrative employment because of discriminatory hiring practices, some embarked on their own entrepreneurial activities, and often these ventures included crimes of various sorts. To well-established, privileged "Nordics," this sort of behavior was hardly what one should expect of responsible, contributing members of society. In this ideological pattern—perhaps we can even call it a syndrome—we can once again discern a circular sort of causation. Bigotry contributes to poverty. Poverty gives rise to crime and other social problems. These problems, in turn, reinforce bigotry.

This is not to say that if decent employment had been available to all immigrants and none of them suffered from poverty, crime would have been nonexistent. American history has shown us that even vast wealth has not prevented some members of the elites from engaging in criminal activity. Still, the amplifying effect of immigrant struggles to survive seems clear.

The disapproving gaze of the eugenics movement swept beyond recent immigrants, though the relatively sudden influx from Europe did draw much of their attention. Other constituencies also found themselves on the eugenicists' agenda. Native Americans in reservation communities did not seem to be doing very well in the "fitness" battle, especially if poverty was an inherited trait. African Americans, with a few notable exceptions, exhibited many of the same problems.

To discuss these issues and express concern was one thing. What to do about them was another. An obvious strategy might be to encourage the *most* "fit" to have more children and to outbreed the *less* fit. One problem with that solution was that it just did not seem to be happening. The poor tended to have more children than the elites. In the nineteenth century, the arch English social Darwinist Herbert Spencer had addressed this issue. The root cause, Spencer concluded, was that cells within the human body competed among themselves, just as individuals and social groups competed on a larger scale. Brain cells competed with the "germ" cells involved in reproduction. Among the elites, brain cells obviously were far more active than those of the lower classes, and their germ cells suffered as a consequence.

The lower classes placed much fewer demands on their brains and therefore displayed far greater fertility.⁸⁰

We might hesitate to take this theory seriously enough to devote further discussion to it, but it does offer additional insight into eugenicist perspectives. Spencer could not have known about twentieth-century studies that have consistently correlated high birth rates with high rates of infant mortality, which in turn correlate with poverty. We can never know what Spencer or his colleagues might have made of this information. It does seem clear, however, that as poverty decreases and infant mortality drops, birth rates also fall. Eugenacists would face a logical challenge to reconcile this result with their insistence on the immutability of inherited characteristics, presumably including brain cells, with the environmental effects of improved living conditions.

But given the general failure of elites to produce the maximum number of progeny for the good of society, an alternative might be to *discourage* the less fit from having so darn many kids. Persuasion through reasoned argument seemed unlikely to be effective in this case. By the same token, outright compulsion might well provoke unpleasant and even disruptive resistance—not only from the people involved, but even from their soft-hearted but misguided defenders. An easier strategy remained open, however. Discrete sterilization—whether voluntary or not—might be a neater way to achieve the same result.

Many segments of the American population were especially vulnerable. Among these were prison populations, members of Native American reservation communities, patients in mental hospitals, and even hospital patients in general. In keeping with “the latest science,” a number of states early in the twentieth century passed laws allowing, and in some cases, even requiring, involuntary sterilization of people the authorities deemed unfit. Indiana passed a law permitting mandatory sterilization for certain categories of people in 1907, and by the 1930s, more than twenty-nine states had followed suit. By 1935, an estimated thirty thousand individuals deemed “feeble-minded” had been sterilized.⁸¹

We will probably never know the full number of people who underwent this procedure. Late in the twentieth century, however, the public learned that tens of thousands of Native American women who had entered hospitals for a range of treatments under the auspices of the federal government had undergone sterilization without their permission or knowledge. The State of Vermont continued to carry out such a policy on the Abenaki and other Native Americans until well into the 1970s.⁸²

Eugenics had a number of approving supporters on both sides of the Atlantic, including the eminent author George Bernard Shaw. Among the

admirers was the young Adolf Hitler. Hitler and his like-minded colleagues saw American sterilization of "undesirables" and the establishment of reservations for Native Americans as models that were well worth considering.

* * *

If there is a common theme in much of this, it seems to be that the justification for discrimination and persecution has usually involved a fantasy of threat arising from the oppressed. In the United States, racists promoted the image of sexually rapacious African Americans as a threat to "white" women. Less rabid voices saw them as threats to the jobs of lower-class "whites." As we have seen, this was a useful tool for the promotion of "racial" conflict. W. E. B. DuBois in 1870 wrote that

. . . the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white.⁸³

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the biological model of inferiority that so excited eugenicists and immigration exclusionists in the United States had had a significant influence on European thinking. The young Adolf Hitler admired the American methods of dealing with these issues. He was especially interested in the idea of sterilizing the "unfit." In the 1930s, the definition of the "unfit" in Germany came to include the mentally deficient (however diagnosed), the physically disabled, homosexuals, Jews, Rom (or "Gypsies"), and Slavs. The horrors of the Holocaust are so well documented that to review them in detail here is unnecessary.

The events of the twentieth century up to the end of World War II offer a ghastly example of the direction in which the pernicious concept of "race" can lead. In the next chapter we shall consider the trajectories of racism, and the struggles to overcome it, from the postwar years up to the present.

CHAPTER 7

From World War II to the Present

The rise of fascism and World War II ultimately discredited the eugenics movement in the minds of most people, but it did little to eradicate racism. After the war, the American military was still segregated, despite the heroic accomplishments of such “all Black” units as the Tuskegee Airmen.¹ And at the beginning of the war, the federal government rounded up some 120,000 American citizens of Japanese descent and held them in prison camps until the war was over.²

The government perpetrated this internment—now infamous—on the grounds that American citizens of Japanese descent who were living on the West Coast posed a security threat after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. The measure took little or no account of the fact that many of these people, especially the younger generation, had never been to Japan and spoke only English, or that many Americans of Japanese descent were serving in the United States armed forces at the time. In 1941 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the Secretary of War to define “exclusion zones” on the West Coast—zones from which Japanese Americans were to be barred, even though tens of thousands of them lived there.³ Congress ratified his order in 1942, making it a misdemeanor for anyone to defy federal exclusion orders. The military commander responsible for the West Coast, General John DeWitt, began by imposing a curfew on Japanese Americans and later ordered them removed from the area.

Thus, thousands of American citizens, many of whom had lived in their communities for generations, left their homes and belongings behind and boarded government transport to live in barbed-wire compounds in Arizona, New Mexico, and other western states for the next several years. The only reason was their Japanese ancestry.

In 1943, the Supreme Court in the case of *Hirabayashi v. the United States* upheld the use of “race” as a valid criterion for targeting these citizens and interning them in special “relocation centers.” In *Korematsu v. the United States* in 1944, the Court once again upheld the government’s actions.

The rationale for the massive, collective internment was that it would have been too difficult to investigate individual cases. It was far more efficient to incarcerate a large number of innocent people in the hope of capturing the guilty—however many or few those guilty might be. The assumption was that many of these citizens maintained a primary loyalty to Japan and therefore were liable to commit acts of sabotage against the United States. Despite such allegations, however, after six decades, not a single instance of such sabotage has ever come to light.

The government did not refer to these centers as “prisons” or “concentration camps,” although the “relocatees” certainly were not free to leave. Their internment lasted until 1945, and many never recovered the houses and other property they had lost. In the 1970s, over a generation later, President Gerald Ford approved compensation for the survivors of the internment.⁴

Racism against African Americans in the Postwar Era

National economic recovery after the war did little to relieve the patterns of racism. Jim Crow laws remained in effect in the southern states. Even African American musicians, actors, and other celebrities suffered the insult and indignity of being barred from using the front doors of restaurants or nightclubs where they entertained the guests, and in many cases they could not get hotel accommodations. Until 1947, professional major league baseball (at that time considered the “national sport”) was entirely segregated. Some teams, such as the Boston Red Sox, remained overtly racist in their management philosophy for decades afterward. When the Brooklyn Dodgers took on the African American Jackie Robinson in 1947, some of the players on his own team subjected him to snubs, insults, and general hostility.⁵

Progress: Brown vs. Plessey

President Harry S Truman put an end to segregation in the military in 1948, and as a result of his stance on civil rights, Democrats in the southern states rose in opposition. As we saw in the last chapter, they became known as the “Dixiecrats” and took an intransigent stand against “racial” equality.⁶ The Dixiecrats in Congress regularly defeated civil rights legislation in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It may be of some interest, though perhaps of debatable relevance, that almost fifty years after Strom Thurmond of South Carolina led the Southern Democrats’ rebellion against the party in order to fight civil rights, the public learned of the existence of Thurmond’s unacknowledged, illegitimate daughter by an African American mother.⁷

During the same period, many African Americans left the South for northern industrial areas where job and social opportunities were more promising.⁸ This demographic movement began a process that gave rise to predominantly African American “inner cities,” initiating “white flight” from the cities to outlying suburbs.

At this juncture, in the early 1950s, a Supreme Court decision regarding the segregation of schools had an explosive impact on the struggle for “racial” equality. Half a century earlier in 1896, the Supreme Court had ruled in the case of *Plessey v. Ferguson* that the 14th amendment of the Constitution, which requires equal treatment of citizens regardless of “race,” nonetheless allowed for segregated facilities—including schools—if these were “equal.” In the early 1950s, a team of attorneys argued in several lower state and federal courts that while schools in many states were *separate* with regard to “race,” they were far from equal. These attorneys included Thurgood Marshall, who was later to become the first African American to become a Justice of the Supreme Court.

School districts throughout the United States varied widely in many respects. Whether by accident, history, or design, most predominantly “black” schools in the North, the Midwest, and especially in the South were far poorer than predominantly “white” schools—although some of these were also poor. Generations of discrimination had resulted in many low-income African American communities, and their school districts reflected this fact. Historically, the major source of support for schools has always been the local property tax base. An obvious consequence has been that schools in mainly African American districts, where the poverty levels usually have been much higher than the national average, have been under-funded and inferior to schools in districts with greater investment in their school systems. The number of teachers per student, the equipment available for teaching, and the quality of the school buildings has varied to extreme degrees.

But even in largely urban areas with multiple schools, segregation often meant that African American children had to attend “black” schools even when higher quality “white” schools were much closer to their homes. In a number of urban areas, African American parents attempted to enroll their children in better schools within the same cities, but over and over again, local school officials blocked these attempts. Repeatedly, state courts upheld the officials. After this occurred in Topeka, Kansas, parents finally succeeded in getting a hearing before the United States Supreme Court.⁹

In the case of *Brown v The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, lawyers for the plaintiffs presented evidence from the work of the prominent sociologist Kenneth B. Clark, himself an African American, demonstrating that segregated schools caused significant, and possibly irreparable, damage to

children.¹⁰ Clark had showed sets of dolls to African American children. Some of the dolls were dark and had African American features, and some were light-colored with blond hair and blue eyes. Clark asked the children to pick out the "good" doll and the "bad" doll, the "pretty" doll and the "ugly" doll. He found that the children almost always chose the "white" dolls as the "good" ones or the "pretty" ones, and the dark dolls as the "bad" or "ugly" ones. The damage to these children's self-esteem was difficult to deny. In 1954 the Court ruled unanimously that the 1896 *Plessey* ruling in favor of "separate but equal" schools was untenable. The following year the Court ordered the lower federal courts to end school segregation with "all deliberate speed."¹¹

The *Brown* decision caused predictable outrage throughout the South and met resistance in other regions as well. The *Brown* case had, after all, involved the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, which is well north of the old Mason-Dixon Line. The "all deliberate speed" wording also caused problems, because it did not clearly define the rate at which desegregation should proceed. In numerous parts of the country, more than a generation would pass before many school districts even came close to achieving equality and integration. The ruling did, however, mark a turning point in American history—or at least, the promise of one. Many have seen it as a threshold to the modern struggle for civil rights—a struggle that has involved many casualties.

In the following year, the Interstate Commerce Commission prohibited segregation in public transportation that crossed state lines, which included buses, trains, and airplanes. The persistence of segregation in spite of the law led to the "Freedom Rides" in 1961, when African American and "white" members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and their supporters rode buses together into the Deep South.¹² They met with such violent attacks that Attorney General of the United States Robert F. Kennedy intervened with federal troops.

Blood on the Ground

Nineteen fifty-five was the year in which a young African American from Chicago named Emmett Till took the train to Mississippi to visit some relatives. He was fourteen years old. During his visit, he allegedly whistled at a "white" woman. Three days later, the woman's husband and another man dragged Till from his bed in the middle of the night, beat him so brutally that they knocked out his right eye, shot him, tied a weight around his neck with barbed wire, and threw his corpse into the river.

The identity of the murderers was no great mystery. Less than a month later, however, a jury acquitted the men—Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam—after

little more than an hour of deliberation. A few months later, the murderers willingly recounted their crime in a paid interview for *Look* magazine, knowing that the principle of double jeopardy shielded them from further prosecution.¹³

The national revulsion at this murder did, however, serve to energize the civil rights movement. Emmett Till's grieving mother defied the Mississippi coroner's demands to keep the coffin sealed when he shipped it to Chicago. She held a memorial service with an open coffin, which hundreds of people attended, exposing her son's brutalized face to the public media. *Jet* magazine published an article with photographs of Till's battered face, and other news media reproduced the picture.

Justice was glacially slow in Mississippi, however. Half a century after Till's murder, in spring 2005 his relatives succeeded in having his body exhumed in order to resume the investigation of the crime,¹⁴ but no additional charges have ever been filed. Many decades later, as a reflection of the times, a man born in Mississippi stated

When I was coming up in Mississippi I never knew it was against the law to kill a black man . . . I learned that when I went in the Army [in World War II]. I was seventeen years old. When they told me, I thought they were joking.¹⁵

In the meantime, the struggle escalated. Months after Emmett Till's murder, an African American woman named Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama defied the city's segregated transportation system by refusing to take a seat in the back of a public bus.¹⁶ A quiet, gentle woman who worked as a seamstress, Ms. Parks so enraged the bus driver that he called the police, who arrested and jailed her. The result was a year-long, city-wide boycott of the bus system by African Americans, who chose to walk to work in the rain rather than support the segregated bus service. The boycott demonstrated the effectiveness of collective action and peaceful protest. But it also energized those who opposed equal rights.

In 1957, African Americans attempted to integrate public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas by having a few courageous children show up for the first day of classes at a "white" school. Governor Orval Faubus activated the Arkansas National Guard and ordered the troops to block the school entrance, while "white" adults in the crowd taunted, threatened, and screamed at the "black" children. The disorder escalated until President Eisenhower—with reluctance, by some accounts—sent federal troops to Little Rock to enforce the law. These troops included seasoned—and integrated—elite airborne units.

In the same year, Congress passed a civil rights act establishing a commission to oversee voting rights. They charged the commission with setting up a system of voting referees and observers at polling places.

In February 1960, African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, staged a peaceful protest by sitting at a "whites only" lunch counter in a Woolworth's store. The national publicity they received gave impetus to the movement, and—in some quarters, at least — it raised the general public's consciousness about patterns of institutional racism in the South. A mob attacked a peaceful civil rights demonstration in Montgomery, Alabama in 1961, and several hundred federal marshals intervened. In the same year, the Interstate Commerce Commission prohibited segregation in transportation terminals and stations. In 1962, however, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy approved FBI wiretaps on the telephone of the civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

Police on horseback in Birmingham, Alabama in the following year, 1963, attacked peaceful demonstrators, including children, using attack dogs. In the same year, a quarter of a million people marched on Washington in support of President Kennedy's proposed new civil rights bill, in the largest demonstration in the national capital up to that time.

That year the avowed racist Brian de la Beckwith shot and killed Medgar Evers, state chair of the NAACP in Mississippi, on the front steps of Evers's house. In the same year, a bomb destroyed a predominantly African American church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young girls. Over thirty years after the death of Evers, a jury in 1994 finally convicted de la Beckwith of his murder, and early in the twenty-first century a jury convicted Bobby Frank Cherry and Thomas Blanton Jr. for the church bombing. By that time the murdered little girls, had they lived, would have been middle-aged women.

Civil rights activists designated the summer of 1964 as "Freedom Summer." CORE and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized voter registration drives and poll-monitoring in the South.¹⁷ That May, three young civil rights workers—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—visited Neshoba County, Mississippi to investigate allegations of "racial" conflict, and members of the Ku Klux Klan murdered them. According to court testimony, Klan members deliberately lured the civil rights volunteers into a trap by setting fire to an African American church. By the time the three volunteers arrived at the scene, Klan members had already dug their graves in an earthen dam. A sheriff's deputy, a member of the Klan, stopped their car and held them long enough for the murderers to get organized, then released them to their deaths.¹⁸

A jury at the time acquitted most of the accused, convicting a few of minor offenses. Those who were acquitted included one Edgar Ray Killen, who had organized the murder. The jury acquitted Killen because one juror stated that she could not bring herself to convict a preacher.

Over forty years later, in June, 2005, the case was reopened in a federal court, and the defendant, now eighty years old, stood trial for murder. On June 21, exactly forty-one years to the day after the crime, a jury in Philadelphia, Mississippi found Killen guilty of three counts of a reduced charge of manslaughter.

The movie *Mississippi Burning* portrays the murders and subsequent investigation with considerable license. In the film, the FBI plays a major role in cracking the case. In reality, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI paid little attention to it. One can only surmise that they were far too busy investigating Martin Luther King's telephone calls. During the search for the bodies of the three civil rights workers, investigators also found the bodies of nine other men, all African American. To this day their bodies remain unidentified, and no charges ever have been filed in connection with their deaths.

In the summer of 2005 many citizens in Philadelphia, Mississippi, expressed relief that the matter of the civil rights workers had finally reached resolution. But opinions differed within the community and beyond. For many, it was a shame to "dig up the past" and try an old man who was not going to live much longer anyway. Others pointed out that murder has no statute of limitations. And lingering questions remain. Who were those dead African American men whose bodies investigators discovered only by accident? What had happened to them? How many more were there? And why, with the evidence so strong, did the jurors of this community elect to convict Killen on a lesser charge, rather than murder in the first degree?

In 1964 Congress passed another civil rights act to enforce equal accommodations in public schools and to ban discriminatory practices by labor unions or employers. The act passed the Senate despite a filibuster by Southern senators. This was also the year when "race riots" erupted in Chicago, Philadelphia, and several other cities. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in August 1964, almost a century after the Civil War, making such unfair tactics as literacy tests and poll taxes violations of federal law.

As the 1964 National Democratic Convention in Atlanta approached, the Mississippi Democratic Party was unabashedly in favor of segregation. Beleaguered civil rights activists formed an alternative party they named the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which they asserted was the only *truly* democratic party in the state because it was open to everyone. They

ran a slate of delegates—Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine, and Victoria Jackson Gray—to run for two seats in the House of Representatives and to oppose the defiant racist John Stennis in the Senate. The Freedom Democratic Party delegation's demands to be seated at the national convention raised national consciousness, won support among many other state delegations, and embarrassed the national party leadership. The Freedom Party delegates refused a compromise that would have allowed them two at-large delegate seats. In the end, the racist delegation of the state party won; but the Democratic Convention in 1968 was integrated.¹⁹

In January 1965, Martin Luther King led a march on Selma, Alabama. The same year, an advocate for voter registration in Selma was murdered. The peaceful marchers met a violent reception, including obstruction by state police. In March, King and other civil rights leaders organized a second march in Selma, and the federal government called in troops to deal with the violence. The Klan murdered two other civil rights workers that month—Viola Liuzzo and the Reverend James J. Reeb—pulling abreast of them as they drove down the highway and shooting them through the car window. Recent evidence indicates that the murderer was an undercover FBI informant. President Lyndon Johnson met that year with the intransigent segregationist Governor of Alabama George Wallace in an attempt to negotiate an end to discrimination in that state.

In the North, the Black Panther Party gained attention in the media by adopting a militant stand of "Black separatism." The Council for Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), under the leadership of Stokely Carmichael, had become impatient with the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King and renounced his strategy. The NAACP, in turn, disavowed the militant position of the collective "Black Power" movement.

In 1968, an assassin shot and killed Martin Luther King as he stood on a motel balcony in Memphis. The murderer apparently was a "white" sniper named James Earle Ray, although questions remain about the involvement of others. In the following year, police killed Black Panther leader Fred Hampton as he slept in his Chicago apartment, firing dozens of bullets through the walls.²⁰

Congress passed another civil rights act in 1968 calling for fair housing and making it a federal crime to attack civil rights workers—a measure intended to bypass the uncertain justice of local courts in the South. The Reverend Ralph Abernathy led the Poor People's March on Washington to push for equal and fair job opportunities. In the following year, 1969, the Supreme Court finally ordered an immediate end to school segregation, fifteen years after the *Brown* decision.

In 1970, for reasons that remain unclear, police at Jackson State University in Mississippi opened fire on a dormitory filled with African American students, killing two and wounding nine more. Congress renewed the Voting Rights Act, extending it for five more years. The prominent social scientist and presidential advisor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, however, advised President Nixon to deal with the issue of racism through a policy of “benign neglect.”

Progress and Setbacks: Integration and Resegregation in Schools

Despite this “benign neglect,” racism showed few signs of disappearing in the next decades, although some found reason for optimism. A number of television situation comedies included African Americans in major roles that were not overtly derogatory. A few, such as “The Jeffersons” and “The Bill Cosby Show,” featured families who lived comfortable middle-class lives. In the 1970s, the series “I Spy,” starring Bill Cosby and Robert Culp, portrayed two men of different “races” in an equal, easygoing, and adventurous partnership. Decades later, however, in the first years of the twenty-first century, some civil rights leaders pointed out that African American characters had all but disappeared from network programming, and on cable television, many African American roles featured criminal behavior.

Despite the *Brown v. Board* decision, by the mid 1970s it was apparent that residential patterns had created or maintained de facto segregation in public schools, even where school segregation was not necessarily the result of intentional policy. That was the case even—and especially—in the North. Large cities had concentrations of African Americans in some school districts, while the relatively wealthy suburbs tended to be predominantly “white.” Since investment in schools relies on local property taxes, schools in wealthy districts enjoy great advantages in funding, while “inner city” schools are often dilapidated, understaffed, and unsafe.

One attempt to alleviate this problem in the mid 1970s involved busing students to different schools in order to produce a more balanced distribution. Although there were some successes in this project, the furor and protest resulting from the initiative drew far more attention. Boston, which over a hundred years earlier had been a major center of abolitionist sentiment, now had angry mobs surrounding buses full of schoolchildren and threatening violence. Eventually, advocates of redistribution moved away from the idea of “forced busing” and sought other, more nuanced strategies such as creating “magnet” schools designed to attract students from various districts.

Despite such efforts, in the first few years of the twenty-first century many observers have expressed concerns that schools have been re-segregating. In

2005, public schools in the North and other parts of the country were more thoroughly segregated than they had been forty or fifty years earlier. Jonathan Kozol wrote in 2005 that

Schools that were already deeply segregated twenty-five or thirty years ago are no less segregated now, while thousands of other schools around the country that had been integrated either voluntarily or by the force of law have since been rapidly resegregating.²¹

Further, "According to a census report from 2002, the top five residentially segregated metropolitan areas in the United States are Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Newark."²² Much of this reflects de facto residential segregation rather than open, flagrant policies of the sort that existed up to the 1960s, but the effects are difficult to distinguish. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the long history of "red-lining" neighborhoods by realtors and banks that control mortgage loans, though illegal, has helped to reinforce the exclusion of African Americans from many residential areas.

In 2002–2003, according to Kozol, eighty-seven percent of children in Chicago public schools were African American or Hispanic, as were ninety-seven percent in Washington, D.C. In Detroit, ninety-six percent of the students were African American or Hispanic; in Philadelphia and in Cleveland, seventy-nine percent.²³

Although residential segregation is a major cause of this situation, Kozol asserts that other factors have exacerbated the pattern. In a Seattle neighborhood that was roughly half "Caucasian" in 2002, one elementary school's enrollment was ninety-five percent "Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian." A teacher described "clusters of white parents and their children each morning on the corner of a street close to the school, waiting for a bus that took the children to a predominantly white school."²⁴ Enrollment in the Martin Luther King School in New York, built in a well-to-do, predominantly "white" neighborhood near Lincoln Center with the intention of promoting integration, is nonetheless mostly African American and Hispanic.

Here and there, however, are some signs that things can improve. In Wade County, North Carolina, which includes the city of Raleigh, school officials have addressed the problems of the concentration of poor children in impoverished schools by setting a limit of forty percent low-income enrollment in any single school. To achieve a greater mix, they bus students throughout the county. Some parents have objected to this policy, but it has achieved undeniable results. In that county,

only 40 percent of black students in grades three through eight scored at grade level on state tests a decade ago. Last spring, 80 percent did. Hispanic

students have made similar strides. Overall, 91 percent of students in those grades scored at grade level in the spring, up from 79 percent 10 years ago.²⁵

The policy does not explicitly address “race.”

About 27 percent of the county’s students are low-income, a proportion that has increased slightly in recent years. While many are black and Hispanic, about 15 percent of the district’s black students are working- and middle-class, and not poor.²⁶

The policy has received some national attention. And despite some parental objection to long bus trips, as a retired superintendent put it, “Is it worth doing? Look at 91 percent at or above grade level. Look at 139 schools, all of them successful. I think the answer is obvious.”²⁷

In December 2006, however, the Supreme Court heard arguments in opposition to comparable efforts toward voluntary desegregation in Louisville, Kentucky, and Seattle. Despite the long history of segregation in Kentucky, the community had made concerted attempts to overcome that legacy, with widespread support among parents and a good deal of success. But one parent who had recently moved to the community and experienced difficulty in enrolling her son in the school of her choice sued the county. Her attorneys argued that the policy was illegal because it recognized “race” as a criterion for desegregation. On June 28 2007, the Supreme Court agreed.

Affirmative Action

Compared to earlier decades, the late 1970s and much of the 1980s seemed relatively quiet with regard to “race,” although the pressures from unresolved problems continued to build. One point of contention came to the forefront in 1978 when the Supreme Court issued an important decision bearing on the policy of “affirmative action.”

President Kennedy had introduced the term “affirmative action” in 1961. At that time the term referred specifically to government contracts. Kennedy issued an executive order to the effect that any contractors doing business with the federal government must not only avoid discriminatory practices with regard to “race, creed, color, or national origin,” but that they must take “affirmative action” to prevent or correct any such practices.

The meaning of the term became more inclusive in 1965, when President Johnson asserted in a speech that “affirmative action” constituted a remedy for the *past effects* of discrimination, rather than merely being an attempt to avoid such discrimination in the future. To many, this meaning

seemed to imply *preference* for previously disadvantaged constituencies in hiring and promotion. The meaning of affirmative action also came to include women in government agencies. Many universities applied the principle to their admissions and financial aid policies, with varying degrees of energy. Generally, this involved attempts to provide greater access to higher education for "racial minorities" in particular, who often had been denied such access in the past.

By this time, the underlying rationale for affirmative action had acquired yet another aspect. Proponents of affirmative action argued that beyond its earlier remedial purpose and its explicit recognition of past injustice, society *as a whole* stood to benefit from greater inclusiveness. Universities, in particular, used this argument with regard to the makeup of their student bodies.

Such rationales faced a major challenge in 1975 when a "white" student named Alan Bakke, who had been refused admission to medical school at the University of California at Davis, sued the university. Bakke argued that the university's policy of reserving a portion of its admission slots for disadvantaged students had unfairly excluded him, even though he was otherwise qualified. In 1978, the Court issued its decision.²⁸ The ruling stated that Bakke had, in fact, suffered unfair treatment because the university had allocated a specific proportion of its entering class to "minorities" rather than evaluating each applicant as an individual. The phrase "racial quotas" consequently became a loaded term for opponents of affirmative action. The Court did, however, allow for the *consideration* of "race" as one of many other issues that universities could take into account in deciding whether to admit a given student.

The ruling generated much discussion and considerable confusion. The Court seemed clear in disallowing "racial quotas" or anything resembling them, but it did allow universities to pursue *goals* of achieving diversity and even to set timetables for achieving those goals. The *means* of achieving them, however, could not rely on "race" as the sole, or even the predominant, criterion for acceptance of applicants.

In the decades following the Bakke decision, affirmative action has continued to be a hotly debated issue. Its opponents have referred to it as "reverse discrimination." Even some prominent African Americans who clearly benefited from affirmative action policies in their own careers, such as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, publicly opposed it. Some argued that affirmative action cast suspicion on the validity of achievements that African Americans had accomplished on their own.

A series of subsequent challenges to affirmative action and similar policies had the net effect of reversing some of the progress that legislation and other efforts had achieved in the 1960s. In 2000, a federal court struck

down a University of Texas policy of taking race into account in admissions. The Supreme Court then declined to hear the case, essentially upholding the decision, and the number of African Americans attending the University of Texas dropped precipitously. In 2001, the Eleventh Court of Appeals ruled in the case of *Johnson v. the University of Georgia* that “race” could not be the sole criterion for defining diversity. Diversity could also include other non-“racial” factors, such as economic background.

Everyday Racism

Court cases offer only a skeletal framework of some of the broader issues of the times. Other data tell a deeper, fuller story. In 1996, California passed Proposition 209, forbidding consideration of gender or race in hiring, contracting, or college admissions. A decade later, by 2006, of the 4,802 students enrolled at UCLA only 100 were African Americans, and twenty of these had been recruited as athletes. This represented a drop of 25 from the previous year.²⁹

The average life expectancy of African American males began to decline in the late 1980s, even as it increased for most other segments of the population. In that decade, African American unemployment in inner cities hovered near sixty percent, and by the end of the decade, sixty-six percent of African American children were born out of wedlock.³⁰ With regard to school drop-out rates, deaths by violence, lack of proper health care, and other statistical measures of poverty, the African American statistical profile is among the worst in the United States, exceeded in the negative levels only by Native American reservation communities.

So many African American males are incarcerated that statistically, one male in four is likely to spend time in jail. African Americans, over the decades, have been far more likely than “whites” to be sentenced to death for comparable crimes. Their representation on death row and in prisons in general remains far out of proportion to their presence in the general population. Racism among police has remained a problem in many areas. At one end of the spectrum, this involves the unwarranted stopping of African American drivers, especially those that police consider to be in the “wrong” part of town, or even those who, in the opinion of the officers, seem to be driving cars that are too expensive. The term “racial profiling” came into vogue during the 1990s. Some have referred to such police action as arresting people for “driving while black.” Many instances have occurred of police using excessive violence against African American “suspects.”

Numerous cases of such police behavior have been recorded on videotape over the years, but probably the most notorious instance was the beating of

Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991. King, an African American, allegedly resisted arrest. Police stunned him with a tazer, a weapon that shoots an electric charge to immobilize the target. On videotape, the police officers then proceeded to beat King, who was now lying on the ground, for several minutes with their nightsticks.

Largely as a result of the publicity that arose from the repeated televising of this beating on network and cable news channels, several officers were charged. The trial took place in Simi Valley, a wealthy and mainly "white" suburb of Los Angeles, and in 1992, the jury acquitted the officers except for one minor charge. As the news spread, riots broke out in Los Angeles and lasted for five days. Several months later, the federal government charged the police officers with violating Rodney King's civil rights, and this time the jury found them guilty. They received sentences of two and a half years in prison.

Voting has continued to be a problem. In many states, people with a record of felony conviction lose the right to vote for the rest of their lives. The effect of this has been to remove disproportionate numbers of African Americans, males in particular, from the voting rolls.

It became apparent in the 2000 presidential election that many African Americans attempting to vote continue to face illegitimate obstacles. The problems that occurred in Florida were most notorious, but voting irregularities were hardly limited to that state. Ploys to interfere with voting rights included inaccurate lists that falsely named thousands, and probably hundreds of thousands, of African Americans as convicted felons, thereby excluding them from voting. Unidentified parties distributed misinformation in African American communities, giving false locations for polling places, misstating the date of elections, and instructing people to come to the polls the day *after* election day. Problems with faulty voting machines became a national scandal, and the greatest number of malfunctioning voting machines tended to be clustered in predominantly African American precincts. Kathleen Harris, then Florida's Secretary of State whose duties included overseeing voting procedures, ran for Congress after the election fiasco and won easily.

The elections of 2004 involved many similar problems. This time, Ohio became the main focus of attention. In effect, Ohio became the new Florida. Many familiar debacles occurred, some of them made easier through computer technology. In Miami County, Ohio, more than 13,000 additional votes for George W. Bush suddenly appeared in the computerized voting records after all precincts had already reported their results.³¹

Some of the old problems that had occurred in Florida now reappeared in Ohio. "Voters were told, falsely, that their polling place had changed. . . ."

phone calls instructed Democrats “not to cast their votes until Wednesday, November 3 . . .” [election day, of course, was November 2], and in some cases, “election personnel or hired goons bused in to do the job ‘challenged’ voters—black voters in particular—to produce documents confirming their eligibility to vote.”³² Dramatic disparities in the numbers of voting machines in Democratic and Republican districts forced people in some predominantly Democratic precincts to stand in line for ten hours or more—or give up and go home—while those in Republican districts voted quickly and went on their way. Representative John Conyers held public hearings on the Ohio voting question. The committee’s report noted “a wide discrepancy between the availability of voting machines in more minority, Democratic and urban areas as compared to more Republican, suburban and exurban areas.”³³

One could argue that such issues might not necessarily indicate racism, in the strictest sense. An alternative explanation could be that since African Americans have voted overwhelmingly for Democrats in recent history, the officials were merely suppressing the *Democratic* vote, not the “black” vote per se. One can only ponder the difference.

Yet some positive historic changes have become evident during recent decades. African Americans have become mayors of several major cities and won election to a range of other significant government offices. Courts have dealt with numerous discrimination cases. In 1996, the huge Texaco oil corporation agreed to pay over 176 million dollars to its African American employees in compensation for discrimination in salaries and promotion. Key evidence in the case included a recording of racist comments by a high executive. Still, as of 2006, African American representation in Congress, and particularly in the Senate, was far less than their proportion in the general population. Indeed, when Illinois recently elected Barak Obama to the Senate, he became only the third African American to serve in the Senate since 1881.

“White” Supremacists

Despite a few advances, the first few years of the twenty-first century offer little reason to assume that racism will disappear any time soon as an aspect of American culture. In the 1990s, as we mentioned in the preface, President Clinton underscored the importance of the issue, calling for a “national dialogue on race.” Many prominent people took part in this dialogue, but the result seemed to be little more dramatic than a general recognition of the problem and of the need to address it. In the meantime, beyond the public discussion, legislation, and court rulings, a violent tradition

dating back at least to the founding of the Ku Klux Klan has continued with grim determination.

Proudly racist, militant "white supremacist" organizations have remained a part of American life. The original Ku Klux Klan, whose members terrorized the South after the Civil War, shrank in significance with the end of Reconstruction—partly, no doubt, because the Klan had largely achieved its goals. By the late 1870s, state and local governments had assumed the task of suppressing African Americans' ability to vote or participate in political activity, or even to achieve economic betterment.

The Klan gained strength in the 1920s, partly as a result of D. W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation*, which glorified the night riders as defenders of Southern "white" womanhood, but by World War II it had dwindled once again. It resurged in the 1950s and 1960s in reaction to efforts to improve civil rights.

Other organizations with similar racist philosophies also continued to be a part of the American scene, though generally they have been scattered, with small memberships. The American Nazi Party under the flamboyant leadership of George Lincoln Rockwell³⁴ gained some media attention in the 1950s and 1960s. Other "white" supremacist groups such as the Aryan Nation and its spin-offs also drew some press coverage, particularly when they had violent confrontations with law enforcement agencies. But the low visibility of such groups in the national media was somewhat misleading.

In 2004, the Southern Poverty Law Center counted 762 "hate groups" throughout the United States.³⁵ Their categories included Ku Klux Klan organizations, Neo-Nazi groups, "racist skinheads," "Christian Identity" groups, "neo-Confederates," and a mixed category they grouped as "Other." The Center also noted 108 militant "Black separatist" groups. Organizations in each of these categories have their own special focuses, though they share many. Anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial are especially important themes in the Christian Identity, neo-Nazi, and skinhead groups. Racism directed at African Americans is a consistent factor in all of them, except, of course, "Black separatist" organizations.

In the case of the neo-Confederate organizations such as the League of the South, a prominent theme has been revisionist history or, as many members might put it, "correcting misperceptions" of the ante-bellum South. Essentially, their argument goes, slavery was not that bad. Slaves and masters shared mutual affection and respect. The Civil War was not about slavery, but about various injustices that the North had perpetrated on the South. Allegedly, these included such offenses as unjust tariffs, invasion, and attempts to impose a godless industrialism on an idyllic rural way of life.³⁶ Some of the leading proponents of this view are college professors. Many

of them, including history professor Clyde Wilson of the University of South Carolina, led the fight to keep the Confederate battle flag fluttering in the warm breezes over the state capitol.

It may be significant that in recent years, Nathan Bedford Forrest, the founder of the Ku Klux Klan, has all but surpassed Robert E. Lee in some circles as a revered historic figure. As Mark Potok points out, for generations, Lee had the admiration of many in the North as well as the South.³⁷ His image as a reluctant warrior, courageous in battle and gracious and reflective in defeat, served as a symbol of Southern honor and heroism for over a century. Forrest presents a different sort of image, having supposedly killed thirty people himself, led the massacre of 580 surrendering Union troops at Ft. Pillow, and summarily killed African American prisoners whenever he had the chance.

The longstanding Southern view of the Civil War as a noble “lost cause,” once a theme of romantic melancholy, also seems to have morphed into a sense of “unjust defeat” and even a struggle yet unresolved. Some neo-Confederate writers advocate a new secession to create a Christian (Protestant, of course), “white”-ruled state structured on medieval principles of class hierarchy. It appears that in the minds of many neo-Confederates, the Civil War amounted to the invasion of a peaceful society by aggressive materialists, and for some, the war is not necessarily finished. We might recall the words of the great Mississippi author William Faulkner: “The past isn’t over. It isn’t even past.”³⁸

One aspect most of these hate groups share, no matter how aggressive their posture, is a sense of victimhood. Aside from the “Black separatist” organizations, this may seem a bit puzzling; but a brief visit to the websites of “white supremacist” groups reveals the age-old allegations of Jewish conspiracies, African American threats to “racial” purity, “white” womanhood, employment, and so on.

It might be that public exposure to the candid views of such groups is one of the best means of limiting the damage they can do. As many have said, “sunshine can be the best disinfectant.” Yet we should also consider the diversity of their potential audience. Most people reading this book are perfectly able to form their own judgments, based on their extensive life experience, acquired knowledge, the ability to detect inconsistency, and the cumulative effects of those factors we like to summarize as “common sense.” For many hate groups, however, an important recruitment tactic is to target very young people whose life experience is far more limited. Their methods include racist rock music CDs, comic books, and any other means they can think of that might appeal to children. Some hate organizations have produced racist videogames, many of them extremely violent, and made them available, free, to children on the internet.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, these groups do not seem to have increased their numbers much in the past few years. On the other hand, such categories as "racist skinheads" do not necessarily organize themselves into structured groups, but often operate in shifting circles of acquaintances. Hence the number of members and supporters of these movements is difficult to ascertain.

It might be comforting to assume that most of the members of these groups consist of deluded, and perhaps delusional, social misfits whose own worst enemies are themselves. This certainly has some truth to it. Yet we cannot ignore the bombing of the Murrah building in Oklahoma City in the mid-1990s by Timothy McVeigh, or Eric Rudolph's murders in Atlanta and attacks on medical clinics. Such planned, organized violence by hate groups is far from unique to American society, but has been a consistent part of our past and present.

Law enforcement agencies, ranging from those at the highest levels of the federal government to local police, currently focus much of their concerns on suspected "foreign terrorists." The Southern Poverty Law Center, however, reports that some sixty plots of homegrown domestic terrorism—that is, plots by Americans—have come to light in the past ten years. Many have been prevented, or failed on their own. In 1997 the FBI arrested three Ku Klux Klan members who had been plotting to blow up a natural gas refinery in Texas, an attack that could have killed 30,000 people.³⁹ In 2003, the FBI found a man named William Klar of Noonday, Texas in possession of "more than 500,000 rounds of ammunition, 65 pipe bombs, and remote-control briefcase bombs, together with almost two pounds of deadly sodium cyanide." They also found, along with "white supremacist" literature, material for making a bomb with the cyanide "capable of killing thousands."⁴⁰

The "Red" Hunts

As the civil rights movement began to develop in the late 1940s and 1950s and reactionary forces mobilized in opposition, curious parallel developments occurred in Congress and federal law enforcement agencies. Under J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI, which had enjoyed a good deal of publicity during the Prohibition era, began to investigate American citizens who advocated changes to achieve "racial" equality.

Members of Congress, most notoriously Senator Joseph McCarthy, used information from these investigations and a range of unfounded allegations to harass many of these people, and often, to ruin their reputations and careers, even in the absence of legal charges. The framework for this, and

its overt rationale, was the American obsession with Communism after World War II. With the apparent threat of the Soviet Union as a backdrop, anyone suspected of having communist or socialist leanings was likely to have his or her loyalty to the United States called into question.

Historically, various communist and socialist organizations in the United States had played major roles in strengthening organized labor. Although the labor movement has been deeply factionalized during most of its history, the combined results of organized labor's efforts in the first half of the twentieth century were to alter the situations of working people drastically. As David H. Price points out, "The actions of these groups earned extensive workplace reforms including worker safety rights, labor standards, shortened work-day and work-week standards, and child labor laws."⁴¹ In addition to labor matters, communists and socialists also addressed issues of "racial" injustice. We might recall that the Communist Party in the 1930s was instrumental in preventing the "Scottsboro Boys" from being unjustly executed. During the next decade or so, communists were active in supporting numerous legal cases in support of African Americans. The party lost much of its membership from the 1940s on, however, beginning with the Soviet Union's pact with Nazi Germany.

But by that time, a linkage existed between communism in the United States and progressive work for social justice. In the minds of many of those in power, this was not a good thing. It carried overtones of upsetting the social order. From that perspective, anyone who worked for civil justice ran the risk of being considered "red." This linkage was emphatic in the thinking of J. Edgar Hoover, who shaped the FBI and dominated it for almost five decades.

Hoover's racism and general bigotry was unabashed. He once announced that as long as he was Director of the FBI, no "Negro" would ever be a special agent. Nor were any Catholics, Latinos, or Jews allowed to be special agents until the 1940s.⁴² Hoover's animosity toward African Americans and his low regard for them in general led him to focus his attention on the civil rights movement, which he considered a threat to American society. In Hoover's mind, communist involvement in the civil rights movement was not merely a suspicion, but an assumption. Hoover was not alone in his views. Several members of Congress eagerly joined the hunt for communists and communist sympathizers among the American citizenry. These investigations affected people in many professions, including numerous employees of government agencies. The movie industry offered up many celebrity victims. Investigators also considered higher education to be a hotbed of Communist activity.

Certainly, many academics then and now have been favorably disposed toward Marxist theory. In the 1940s and 1950s, a few were, or had been,

supporters and even members of socialist or communist organizations. Yet as David Price points out, the choices Congressional committees made to go after particular individuals showed a curious pattern. Among anthropologists, for example, some who fell under the suspicious gaze of the FBI were openly Marxist in their perspectives but received only minor attention or scrutiny. Others who had never had any communist or socialist connections underwent extreme questioning and harassment. A key difference, apparently, was whether or not the target had been politically active on "racial" issues.⁴³

The vast majority of anthropologists at the time held strong beliefs in equality among human populations. This had been a central tenet of the discipline since the late nineteenth century, exemplified in the work of Franz Boas, the scholar most anthropologists consider the fonder of American anthropology, and those he taught or influenced. As Price notes, however,

Many anthropologists publishing antiracist technical works in academic books and journals were not subject to extensive, prolonged FBI surveillance; rather it was when they wrote antiracist materials for a more general audience or took action by joining protest movements that the FBI considered them of interest.⁴⁴

The prominent anthropologist Leslie White, for example, had openly credited Marx as an inspiration for his theoretical work. He belonged to the Social Labor Party and had traveled and studied in Russia. Yet White tended to direct his energies toward academic issues and debates, and he drew little more than cursory attention from the FBI. Phileo Nash, in contrast, had no Marxist affiliations and showed no strong socialist leanings in his work. Yet throughout his career Nash worked strenuously in the public arena for "racial" equality and social justice on a number of fronts. Nash was one of the founders of the American Council for Race Relations in 1944, and he was a member of President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights in 1948.

As a result of these activities, the FBI launched a "full field loyalty investigation" of Nash. They unearthed one informant who had been his supervisor in the Office of War Information. The anonymous informant reported that Nash had once requested permission to hire a "Negro" secretary, but the supervisor had "discouraged the idea."⁴⁵ Although no one ever charged Nash with anything, the innuendos about Communist affiliation followed him for decades.

The FBI also suspected the anthropologist Gene Weltfish of being a Communist, partly on the basis of anonymous informants. A major reason for her status as a "person of interest," however, was her having co-authored a pamphlet in 1943 with Ruth Benedict, another anthropologist at Columbia,

titled *The Races of Mankind*. The pamphlet was part of a series intended for distribution to troops through the USO. Its major point was to offer evidence for the fallacy of popular “racial” categories and stereotypes.

It became a *cause celebre* when the chair of the House Military Affairs Committee, Congressman Andrew J. May, prohibited its distribution in the Army. May was from Kentucky, and Kentucky was one of the three Southern states specifically cited in the pamphlet from the Army World War I intelligence tests to show that Northern blacks had scored higher than Southern whites.⁴⁶

The book received so much attention from this Congressional blustering that eventually, it sold over a million copies. Consequently, it probably had a far more profound impact on the public than it would have otherwise. The FBI and Senator McCarthy, nonetheless, were now hot on Weltfish's trail, and she received a subpoena to appear before Congress in 1953.

At one point during the hearings, Senator McCarthy began to challenge her about the book:

Sen. McCarthy: Just opening at random, I find something on page 18 of the book entitled, “The Races of Mankind” which should interest my southern colleagues to some extent. It shows the intelligence tests of the

Southern Whites: Arkansas 41:55 [and]

Northern Negroes: Ohio: 49:50

Miss Weltfish: May I state that this came from Army records?

Sen. McCarthy: Pardon?

Miss Weltfish: That this material came from Army records.⁴⁷

Two weeks before that hearing, Weltfish had received notice that her job at Columbia, where she had taught since 1936, would end at the close of the term. Her colleague Ruth Benedict was no longer alive, but the Congressional committee questioned Weltfish about Benedict's alleged communist connections. Weltfish offered no information on the subject.

As Price puts it,

The committee seemed to believe that those who fought for social equality should be suspected of being Communists. Their attacks indicate that they would have subpoenaed Benedict had she been living, and that they would have accused her of being a Communist for the simple reason that she held progressive views regarding the inherent racial equality of humankind.⁴⁸

We might also consider the case of Ashley Montagu, who for a time was one of the anthropologists best known to the American public. Montagu

spent his life working for "racial" and gender equality. One of his more successful books carried the title *The Natural Superiority of Women*. In 1942 he published his book *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, which has gone through numerous editions and remains in print. He also participated in drafting the United Nations' Statement on Race in 1948. Montagu also took his arguments to the public through the media, appearing often as a guest on such television shows as *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson.

The FBI became suspicious of Montagu's commitment to progressive causes and began investigating him in 1953. The final report in his file, dated 1978, after a quarter of a century of investigation, states that "no information is available to indicate Montagu has been or is in a position to provide information which might be harmful to the national security."⁴⁹ Despite this, however, Rutgers University, where Montagu had taught for years, severed connection with him in 1954. An immediate cause apparently was a letter from an angry alumnus to the president of the university complaining about Montagu's public criticism of Senator McCarthy.

The sorry record of that era contains many more cases of persecution. In later years, most of the public came to view the excessive destruction of careers, and even of lives, with embarrassment. Yet the smokescreen of investigating "Communism" obscured the underlying racism of the inquiries. A few apologists recently have attempted to rehabilitate McCarthy's reputation⁵⁰ But for most of the public who are old enough to remember, the era of governmental abuse of power, with which McCarthy's very name has become synonymous, continues to leave a bad odor.

Yet the racist theme in government investigations long outlasted the end of McCarthy's career. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI invested vast resources in attempting to discredit Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders in the 1960s, even while racist murders by the Klan and other criminal vigilantes resulted in little federal involvement. As we know, a broad range of social and cultural factors lay at the root of this extraordinary wave of persecution. It is useful to consider the draconian laws that Congress passed during this era that gave the government the instruments to carry out the process.

Legal Tools of Oppression

The Hatch Act in 1939 prohibited Communists from working for the federal government. This law would later give teeth to McCarthy's charges of alleged Communists working in government agencies, including the Army, by making them subject to legal action. The Smith Act of 1940 made it a crime to advocate the violent overthrow of the government. The scope of such a crime, as defined in the law, included *belonging to a group or organization* with such

intent. Thus, even a person who had no intention whatsoever of attempting the violent overthrow of the United States government could be in deep trouble as a result of having naively signed the wrong petition or contributing to the wrong innocuous-sounding organization. In 1941, Congress created a committee to identify “un-American” activities. This became the famous, or infamous, House Un-American Activities Committee, or HUAC.

In the late 1940s near the beginning of the cold War era, the Truman administration introduced a “loyalty oath” as a requisite for government employment. The oath’s early proponents, including the President, saw it as a measure to weed out security risks within government agencies, but the device quickly became a far broader tool. The oath included denial of membership in alleged “subversive” organizations, and it was up to the Attorney General to determine which organizations fit that category. Many harmless-sounding groups, or organizations that changed their character over time, could offer means of entrapping well-meaning, but perhaps naïve individuals.

In 1949, the Mundt-Nixon Bill required Communists to register with the government. This created the possibility of prosecuting people whom investigators decided were Communists, but who had failed to register as such. As we recall, suspicions of communist sympathies could arise from nothing more than working for social change and civil justice.

The Internal Security Act of 1950, also known as the McCarran Act, put the machinery in place for some of the McCarthy era’s greatest abuses. It gave the FBI powers to investigate and arrest individuals on the basis of alleged threats to “national security” without having to specify any particular crimes or specific violations of any laws. This act also created the Subversive Activities Control Board, which had the power to determine which groups and organizations were “un-American.” The act empowered law enforcement authorities, particularly the FBI, to arrest “radicals” and hold them without trial in “custodial detention” during “national crises.” It also authorized the State Department to limit issuance of passports and to deport “foreign radicals.”

In the ensuing decades the courts pushed back many of these tactics. Other practices that became discredited and in some cases, nationally embarrassing, simply fell into disuse. But neither the courts nor a progressing national amnesia could repair or undo the damage that the thousands of innocent victims of the process had suffered.

Half a century later, the attacks on the World Trade Center towers in 2001 once again produced a charged atmosphere that opened the way for abusive measures in the name of “national security.” In the aftermath of the attacks, Congress hurriedly, and with little debate, passed the Patriot Act—too hurriedly, in fact, for members to read what they were voting on. Some members complained that they were forced to vote so quickly that the thick

copies of the draft they received were still warm from the photocopying machines. Much of the Patriot Act turned out to be rather familiar, however.

Like the McCarran Act of 1950, the Patriot Act gives federal law enforcement agencies the authority to arrest and detain individuals indefinitely and without counsel, on the grounds (or often, merely the suspicion or allegation) that they pose a threat to "national security." Although the term "un-American" has fallen out of favor in many circles—probably due to its McCarthy-esque connotations—a diffuse reference to "national security" essentially covers any rationale the FBI, Attorney General, or other authorities need to gain information through wiretaps, residential searches, and secret examination of book purchases and library records. In 2006, the public learned that the federal government had bypassed even these flaccid requirements and tapped into the telephone conversations of thousands of American citizens. In the early years of the twenty-first century, such basic aspects of due process as the right to an attorney, to be informed of a charge, or in many cases, the right to let family members know about one's arrest and detention, were often denied.

This offers an interesting contrast with the McCarthy era. Although some people went to jail in the 1950s, many more suffered public humiliation and economic damage as a result of false accusations. In the twenty-first century, however, an unknown number of American citizens and foreign nationals have been held incommunicado or deported without public notice. Rather than public hearings and "witch trials," the modern strategy stresses the opposite—secret detention without trial, a sort of institutionalized invisibility. Of the hundreds or perhaps thousands of "suspects" rounded up since 2001, the vast majority have been people with Arab backgrounds or who were judged to be "Arab-like" in their appearance. A miniscule proportion of these detentions have resulted in convictions for anything. A few detainees have been released with apologies; but an unknown number remain imprisoned for an indefinite duration, often subject to torture and other forms of abuse. Few of these detainees have blond hair, blue eyes, or names like "Smith" or "Perry."

Native Americans

For Native Americans, the second half of the twentieth century involved numerous pendulum swings. "Indian policy" from the very beginning had been subject to the vagaries of wider issues. In the 1940s and 1950s, many Native Americans had served with distinction in World War II and Korea, and in doing so, they had acquired broader experience and some G.I. benefits.

But upon returning to their communities on reservations, most found that little had changed. Popular recognition of the value of Native American cultures lingered to some extent from the 1930s and the era of the Collier administration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but this remained largely abstract. In towns near reservations, discrimination in hiring, grudging service in stores and restaurants, and neglect in schools generally continued as before. And with the conservative slant of Congress in the 1950s, Native American reservations came to seem a “problem” for the unity of the country.

Few McCarthy-era politicians would have gone so far as to declare reservations a threat to “national security,” but some fretted over the “socialistic” model that they perceived in government oversight. In 1953, Congress passed a bill to “get out of the Indian business” and gradually end federally administered reservations. Henceforth, these communities would become independent and self-governing, like any other American community.⁵¹ And presumably, Native Americans would all but disappear by fading into the general populace.

Like the earlier Dawes Act of 1886, which had also attempted the dissolution of reservations, the “Termination” bill of 1953 turned out to be a disaster for the few reservations where it was implemented. The Menomini of Wisconsin, one of the first communities to undergo termination on the grounds that they were on a sound economic footing, quickly faced fiscal disaster, partly as a result of state demands for taxes, and spent years in court before they finally succeeded in regaining their reservation status.⁵² The “Termination” law remained in effect until the 1970s, but after the first few years it fell dormant, and Congress finally repealed it during the Nixon administration.

During the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s, the federal government devoted more funds to assist reservation communities, largely through beefing up the Bureau of Indian Affairs (or BIA). Later in that decade, President Johnson’s Great Society programs and the “War on Poverty” had some beneficial effects on reservations, mostly because these communities more than met all of the criteria necessary to qualify for anti-poverty assistance. Per capita income, crime rates, alcoholism, infant mortality, and school dropout rates all continued to devastate reservations. Perhaps most chilling of all, for decades teenage suicide rates among Native Americans have far surpassed those of any other category in the American population, and in the early years of the twenty-first century they continue to grow. It is difficult to imagine the depth of despair that might account for this deliberate erasure of one’s future. One can only speculate that this future might seem so lacking in value that it is something to be avoided.

Racism certainly has played a part in all of these problems. Yet the situation involves more complex issues. Vast appropriation of resources created an enforced dependency as the only alternative to physical extinction, and employment discrimination at the margins of reservations adds to the problem. Since the end of active conflict over Native American territory in the nineteenth century, racism has operated both as cause and effect of Native American circumstances.

Opinions and attitudes in towns near reservations often stand in stark contrast with popular, abstract views of Native Americans on a generic level. While "white" New Agers on both coasts seek wisdom and purity through sweat lodges and "Indian spirituality," people in towns near reservations often hold stereotypes that involve drunkenness, unreliability, and violence.

In the 1960s and 1970s some Native Americans adopted militant strategies to confront political issues. Activists took over the headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, scattered the files, and occupied the building for several days. On the Pine Ridge Lakota reservation, where leaders of the American Indian Movement confronted the BIA-supported tribal chair Dick Wilson and his "GOON Squad" ("Guardians of the Oglala Nation"), the FBI came in to do battle, and in weeks of struggle, many people died on both sides.⁵³

The American Indian Movement and other activist Native American organizations took some lessons from the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam War.⁵⁴ Among these tactics was the skilled use of the national media, which had developed a sharpened appetite for vivid images and dramatic confrontations. At the base of these protests, however, was the toll of over a century of internal colonialism, as some have called it. While Native Americans had come to be valued as a national symbol, Native Americans as people found barriers, whether they hoped to enter the wider society on an equal basis or to maintain a distinct way of life within it.

A contributing factor in this has been the persistent refusal of the public to take Native American issues seriously. As about one percent of the populace, Native Americans pose no threat in the minds of most of Americans—except perhaps to the conscience. Perhaps this is one reason why sports teams in particular have used caricatures of Native Americans as team mascots. In common usage, as we know, a mascot usually is an animal. But often teams also have such names as "Warriors," "Braves," "Indians," and even, in the nation's capital "Redskins."

To those who object to this, a common response is that these team names express "respect." In New York State and elsewhere, however, many schools have changed their team names—surely a more significant gesture of respect. The National Collegiate Athletic Association recently issued a

list of college teams whose names the organization felt needed to change. One team on the list, the Florida State University “Seminoles,” famous for their fans’ “tomahawk chop,” refused. In the National Football League, the management of the Washington Redskins has also remained proudly defiant. Yet no doubt the decision-makers in that organization would be righteously insulted if anyone were to accuse them of racism.

* * *

Racism has taken different focuses and followed diverse trajectories since World War II, and it has adopted different guises, but clearly it has not gone away. Struggles for civil rights in the United States, in which many lost their lives, made tremendous gains. But much of the battle has been comparable to running up the slopes of shifting sand dunes. Earlier expressions of racism have largely become discredited, but racism has shown an adaptive tenacity, almost comparable to a virus that undergoes mutation in order to counteract resistance by the host. As the very idea of “race” spread historically from its places of origin to a near-global distribution, its updated forms and guises have done so as well.

The concept of “culture,” for example, which became established early in the twentieth century, was a rebuttal to the validity of “race” and the biological determinism that prevailed at the time. Culture stressed the idea of human equivalence and carried an implicit assertion that behavioral differences among populations arise from learning and experience rather than from innate propensities. Culture was an argument for fundamental human equality. In the late twentieth century, however, “cultural differences,” “unique histories,” and so on acquired essentialist aspects. Culture began to acquire the meaning of something “inbred,” something that cannot change.

As a result, allusion to “cultural difference” has become a basis for separatism and discrimination. While rhetoric expounding “racial inferiority” has largely gone out of fashion, we more often now hear of “incompatibilities among different cultures” that imply ancient, primordial, and essentially fixed identities. This, of course, is less blunt than the assertions by voices in extremist groups, who remain unabashed by the older racist rhetoric. We still have those who express nostalgia for the old, “straightforward” ways of asserting “racial” superiority, although they seem to have lost their position in the mainstream. As to where this will take us, we will consider the possibilities and trajectories in the final chapter.

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CHAPTER 8

Will We Ever Be Rid of It?

Certainly any hope of dispelling racism requires the spread of knowledge to correct misinformation. History has shown, however, that knowledge is not enough. Knowledge about the biology of human variability has accumulated dramatically during the past several decades, on a rising curve. Yet we have little reason to believe that racism and the misinformation associated with it have diminished in the same proportion. If anything, it appears that assumptions about the reality of “race” have dodged evidence and adapted themselves to contradictory information, persisting in a changing environment. Even physicians and other health professionals habitually classify patients according to “race” in medical records, despite the genetic complexities we discussed in Chapter 2.

In a 2006 *New York Times* science article, the author discussed a book arguing that human evolution has continued over the last 10,000 years.¹ Given the fact that for evolution to cease, deaths would have to be genetically random, this could hardly be a surprise. But the reviewer extrapolated from this to suggest that culture might have changed too, as a consequence.

Anyone who believes that culture has *not* changed in 10,000 years probably needs to read some archeology and history. And anyone who believes that these changes—the invention of agriculture, the rise of cities, the development of Buddhism, the Internet, and rock and roll—are results of genetic change might look at the history of chimpanzees, our closest cousins. If we have continued to evolve, then so have they. But are chimps in the wild living any differently now than they were 10,000 years ago? Memo to the *New York Times*: culture is not genetic.

Optimists among us would like to believe that the problems of the past have at least diminished. Yet even such an absurdity as the “one drop of blood” principle is not dead—at least not in Louisiana. DeSalle and Yudell note that “during slavery, this rule was used to keep mixed-race children enslaved, preventing a class of mixed-race freepersons.”² Over a century later, in the 1980s,

a woman named Susie Phipps was listed as "colored" on her Louisiana birth certificate because one of her great-great-great-grandmothers had been African American. She had, in other words, 1/64 African American heritage. At the time she was born, Louisiana law had stipulated that "any traceable amount" of African ancestry made one "black," regardless of personal appearance. In 1970, the state had "liberalized" the law to set a standard of 1/32 "Negro blood" to make one "black."³ Ms. Phipps sued the State of Louisiana in federal court to change her listing to "white." The court upheld the "one drop" principle that had applied when she was born, however, and the Supreme Court declined to hear the case. Apparently Susie Phipps is "black," in a society where that still matters.

Voting Issues

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made a tremendous difference in counteracting "racial" exclusion from the political process. According to the Center for Voting and Democracy, African Americans in elective office throughout the country rose from 300 in 1964 to more than 9,100 four decades later, and Latinos held more than 6,000 elective offices.⁴ Some provisions of the act require periodic renewal, however. One of these, Section 5, requires that districts with a history of discriminatory voting practices must receive federal approval for any changes in their election requirements or procedures. When members of the Congressional Black Caucus asked President Bush about his position on this matter, he claimed to be unfamiliar with the act. The White House staff hurriedly put out the word that the president was "firmly committed to protecting voter rights."

Some have expressed the view that such safeguards are no longer necessary because of progress over the past several decades. As if on cue, however, during the summer of 2005 the state legislature in Georgia passed a law requiring that voters present official state or federal picture identification at all polling places. Elisabeth MacNamara, the president of the League of Women Voters of Georgia, wrote to the *New York Times* that

Georgia has become the toughest place in America for eligible registered voters to cast their ballots. After a rancorous and racially charged debate, Georgia lawmakers passed legislation to require voters to produce government-issued photo identification at the polls . . . For the hundreds of thousands of Georgia voters who do not drive, are not in the military, do not work for the government and do not travel abroad, getting a form of ID that will be accepted at the polls will involve traveling to one of only 56 locations in the state that issue such identification, waiting in long lines and paying a fee or declaring indigence.⁵

New Faces of Racism

In the meantime, overt racial conflict appears to be rising in Los Angeles between Mexican and African Americans. Most of this is a consequence of the prison system, where both African Americans and Mexican Americans constitute disproportionate components of the inmate population. Much of the violence involves gangs, and the prison system fosters gang conflict. Susan Straight writes that

prisons are one of California's largest industries and employers. My friends who are correction officers have talked for more than five years now about the endless violence between brown and browner inmates in every facility from juvenile detention halls to maximum security prisons.⁶

Straight reports the experiences of a corrections officer:

He cannot leave a single black prisoner alone, ever, in the laundry room or kitchen, because a group of Mexican-born prisoners continually attempts to murder every black inmate in proximity. It is their sole daily purpose, he says.⁷

Along the Mexican border, armed "white" vigilantes who style themselves "Minutemen" have taken up arms to "protect" the United States from illegal aliens seeking jobs. David Holthouse quotes one of these volunteers, who told him that "the only way I'd be down here is with a bunch of other white guys with guns. Whites are the minority in these border towns, man. They've already been taken over. This is enemy territory."⁸ Said another, "It should be legal to kill illegals . . . Just shoot 'em on sight. That's my immigration policy recommendation. You break into my country, you die." Said another: "The thing to do would be to drop the bodies just a few hundred feet into the U.S. and just leave them there, with lights on them at night . . . That sends the message 'No Trespassing,' in any language."⁹

In such a climate, we can only wonder at Donald Trump's idea for playing the "race" card in his own special way.

In an effort to boost ratings of his reality TV show, *The Apprentice*, Donald Trump is considering some controversial changes. One proposal pits a team of African Americans against a team of white players. "Whether people like that idea or not, it is somewhat reflective of our very vicious world," said Trump. "But needless to say, not everyone thinks it's a good idea."¹⁰

We should also note the efforts of many others to improve the situation. In 2005, a state panel in New York recommended increased coverage of

racism and the history of slavery in public school curricula—an initiative that would include training for teachers. Not surprisingly, however, the idea met with some reluctance, including questions about whether the already full curriculum could accommodate such topics. Nonetheless, the initiative does indicate the awareness of many that such issues have been ignored or brushed over in the past and should be part of students' awareness. Knowledge may not be sufficient, but it certainly is necessary for further progress.

And as we noted in the preface, the disaster in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina and the debacle that followed made it difficult to pretend that racism is not a national affliction. Some media pundits, such as Tucker Carlson, David Brooks, and, of course, Rush Limbaugh, expressed various versions of the idea that somehow, the suffering of the victims was their own fault. The president's mother, Barbara Bush, suggested on National Public Radio that since so many of the victims were deeply impoverished, the loss of their homes and relocation to other cities actually worked well for them.

Others, however, who saw federal agencies all but ignore the flood and hurricane victims who were beginning to die on national television waiting day after day without water, food, and other supplies, had to ask whether this would have happened if most of the faces had been "white." History may show that the chief factor was merely astounding incompetence on the part of the federal agencies that were, or should have been, responsible. But charges of racism have been compelling, persistent, and very hard to put to rest.

Persistent Misinformation: Those Who Should Know Better

Even though overt public expressions of raw racism are less fashionable than they used to be, "race" continues to underlie many discussions of issues ranging from medicine to sports. In the recent controversy over drugs that supposedly work differentially in one or another "race," the fact that "race" cannot be defined on the basis of genetics is usually ignored or brushed aside. So, too, are the vastly different life experiences that millions of people face as a result of being cast into one or another "racial" category, regardless of their individual genomes.

Some might argue that even if large gene pools do not define "racial" groups, perhaps frequencies of *specific* genes would be more useful. Jonathan Marks points out, however, that even the frequencies of particular alleles in different populations do not take us very far in that direction.

A large sample of Germans . . . turn out to have virtually the same allele percentages ($A = 29$, $B = 11$, $O = 60$) as a large sample of New Guineans ($A = 29$, $B = 10$, $O = 61$). A study of Estonians in Eastern Europe ($A = 26$,

B = 17, O = 57) finds them nearly identical to Japanese in eastern Asia (A = 28, B = 17 O = 55).¹¹

To be sure, certain alleles, such as the one associated with sickle cell anemia, do occur with higher frequency among some populations and are all but absent in others. Yet even the sickle cell allele occurs in only a minority of individuals in those African populations where it is present and is even rarer among African Americans. The allele that causes Tay-Sachs syndrome, which occurs mostly among Hasidic Jews, is another example. But with regard to medical treatment, the presence of these alleles clearly is the result of individual genetic inheritance rather than general population characteristics. It would make little sense to define Africans by the sickle cell gene when the majority of people in that designated population lack the trait, or to use Tay-Sachs as a marker for some alleged “race” of Hasidic Jews. The most reasonable approach is to treat the relatively few individuals who actually carry these traits, rather than to attribute them to “racial” groups.

Psychologists have also weighed into the discussion. Jefferson Fish, a psychologist with a strong interest in anthropology, argues that many of his colleagues are disposed to see “race” as a biological reality because to some extent, “racial” categories have the aura of objective, quantitative “science”—especially when they have the suffix “-oid,” as in “Negroid” or “Caucasoid.”¹² Many anthropologists would find this particularly ironic because genetics—which *is* an actual science—has been most instrumental in demolishing the validity of “racial” categories.

Fish notes that within psychology itself, experimental psychology, which has the status of “hard” or “natural” science, has more prestige than social psychology. He adds that “among experimental fields, physiological psychology outranks educational psychology, while in applied fields, clinical psychology (which is more medical/biological) outranks school psychology.”¹³

A recent study by a team of psychologists focused on the development and persistence of learned fear. The researchers concluded that some learned fears are more difficult to unlearn than others. They noted that a conditioned fear of relatively harmless subjects (they use the example of a bird and a butterfly) is more easily overcome than the fear of subjects that actually are potentially threatening (such as a snake or a spider).¹⁴ They then moved on to the conditioned fears of “black” and “white” human faces. On the basis of this study, they suggested that “millennia of natural selection and a lifetime of social learning *may* predispose humans to fear those who seem different from them . . .”¹⁵ [*italics added*].

The juxtaposition of “millennia of natural selection” with “a lifetime of learning” may seem a bit odd, since the two involve entirely different processes.

One is biological, the other experiential. Most anthropologists would place far greater weight on the latter, especially when it comes to attitudes toward other people. The researchers also admit that "black" versus "white" fears, as such, seem unlikely to result from any strong built-in evolutionary imperative, since "black" and "white" populations would rarely have encountered one another earlier in the course of human evolution—at least not often enough to bring about selection for some genetic fear mechanism. They suggest that it might just be a matter of general xenophobia regarding those who appear to be different in any significant way.

*If a general preparedness to fear dissimilar others did indeed evolve, then present-day members of another race, with their physical differences and common categorization as belonging to an out-group, could activate such a mechanism and produce the robust conditioning effect observed in experiment 2 [involving the "black" and "white" faces].*¹⁶ [Italics added]

One might conclude from this that hostility or fear with regard to people of different socially constructed categories *within* a society that has a history of racial oppression and antagonism might, in fact, simply be doing what comes naturally, rather than reflecting socialization.

Jefferson Fish urges greater communication between psychologists and anthropologists. Had such communication occurred in this case, the researchers might have seen the limitations of using subjects with "a lifetime of social learning" in a particular society—where racism has been a pervasive factor for centuries—as a basis for generalizations that they imply to be panhuman in their scope. It is no exaggeration to point out that experimental psychologists often are far more comfortable comparing (and equating) humans with rats and rhesus monkeys than they are in making comparisons among humans of different cultures.

As to an inherent xenophobic tendency as an aspect of human nature, we might allow that some caution in dealing with strangers may be widespread. But usually—especially in kinship-based societies—such caution involves people of the same, basically identical population who lack any known kin ties. Conversely, we have seen many cases in which people who are quite different in appearance—Australian Aborigines and English, for example—have attempted to establish ties, often through sharing women (almost always with the offering on the Aboriginal side). English colonists in various places, ranging from the Virginia Coast to the Pacific Islands, often met with initially friendly welcomes that all too frequently they soon exhausted. In such cases it was not strangeness that bred contempt, but familiarity.

“Race” and Athletics

In the popular arena, a good deal of discussion has centered on the predominance of African American athletes in many (though not all) sports. The issue even inspired a movie with the title *White Men Can't Jump*. John Entine, in the first year of the twenty-first century, published a book with the title *Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're afraid to Talk about It*. Entine accepts the historic fact of extensive genetic admixture among continental populations, but he appears to consider this an exchange that occurred among essentially primordial “racial” divisions. He sees the athletic superiority of Africans and African Americans as comparable to the difference between men and women.¹⁷

Nowadays most professional boxers at the highest levels are African American or Latino. Professional basketball is “dominated” by African Americans, though only at the level of players, not management. Certainly many of these players—indeed, all of them, at the professional level—are superb athletes. But most discussions of “race” in sports either downplay or ignore much of the social and historical context.

It seems significant that in the past century or so, professional sports have offered an avenue to success for those at the most disadvantaged levels of society. Five or six decades ago, boxing had many Jewish, Irish, and Italian fighters at the top levels. The names Maxie Rosenbloom, Gene Tunney, Rocky Marciano, and Rocky Graziano spring to mind. Has there been a genetic change in that period of time? Certainly some African Americans such as Jack Johnson and Joe Lewis also rose to the very top during that period. They experienced obstacles, including overt racism, in reaction to their success, but they did succeed within a “multiracial” field. Decades later, general social bigotry against Jews, Irish, and Italians, though not entirely gone, has certainly decreased, and in the process, opportunities have broadened for these sections of the population. Opportunities have not yet widened to the same extent for African Americans. Athletics remains one obvious—though often deceptive—means of achieving wealth and celebrity.

The issue is far more complex, of course. African Americans were barred from major league baseball until the 1940s and suffered discrimination in many other sports as well, to a far greater degree than most other ethnic or “racial” groups. Relaxation of many of these barriers opened opportunities for talented athletes who in previous generations would have been excluded. Things have gotten better. But the recruitment of young people into these sports also has changed. Asphalt basketball courts in inner city neighborhoods, filled with hopeful African American kids shooting hoops, have

become a contemporary stereotype and symbol of many things, including aspirations to success, fame, and wealth. While in many respects this is a healthy and productive activity, it also creates false hopes among many who correctly, perhaps, perceive that success in basketball is one of their few chances to escape poverty.

Yet even those few who manage to win athletic scholarships to colleges that act as farm teams for the National Basketball Association have little chance, statistically, of going on to professional careers. And at many colleges and universities (with notable exceptions), the graduation rates of athletes in major sports are dismally low—a situation that the National Collegiate Athletics Association has recognized and attempted to address. Few of these players receive encouragement to take challenging courses or to acquire a good education that could help them achieve success in some other field. As John Hoberman puts it,

The black athletes today who refine their athletic skills and little else at American universities are thus the damaged inheritors of an educational philosophy that once promoted manual training as the highest cultural achievement to which black youngsters should aspire.¹⁸

Myths of genetic or "racial" differences in athletic abilities ignore the fact that many individuals in all groups, however defined, have only moderate athletic ability, at best. Yet stereotypes persist. Many still hold the belief that African Americans are not competitive swimmers because their "bones are too heavy."¹⁹ African Americans have been underrepresented in world-class tennis—historically a sport of the wealthy leisure class—even though such notable exceptions as Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Serena and Venus Williams, and now Jamea Jackson should clearly dispel any assertions of "racial" deficiencies in ability. One might as well assume that Chinese have a genetic propensity for ping pong, Puerto Ricans for jai alai, and Canadians for hockey. Or perhaps Spaniards in Pamplona have a biological urge to be chased through narrow streets by herds of angry bulls.

Myths

Often, misinformation is more than a simple lack of knowledge. Misinformation sometimes takes the form of myth—and myth, by its very nature, is irrefutable. As Levi-Strauss has pointed out, myths persist not because they are accurate, but because they are "good to think."²⁰ Myths associated with racism can be especially difficult to dispel because those who

benefit from them, or who *believe* that they do, have a vested interest in maintaining them.

The value of a myth does not lie in its literal truth, since myths have only the most tenuous connection to physical reality or historic events. Myths satisfy because they make statements about relationships, about perplexing and troubling realities. They deny contradictions. They justify. Myths may be preposterous on the face of it, lies from beginning to end, but this is not their vulnerability. To destroy a harmful myth, it would be necessary to create a reality in which the myth no longer has such troublesome contradictions to resolve—to remove, in other words, the *need* for mythological resolution.

“Racial” myths often gain persistence from their ability to produce the results they predict. Discrimination, economic deprivation, poor schools, and other disadvantages that *result* from racism tend to *produce* social problems such as poor school performance or violent behavior, which in turn can reinforce the basis for discrimination. The “race” myth, therefore, produces a special conundrum. Myths, folk beliefs, and other forms of conventional wisdom perpetuate racism; and racism causes and gives energy to these beliefs by producing a need for them, a requirement for its own justification.

If we wish to gain ground against racism in the United States and elsewhere, to challenge myth, even “scientific” myth, is necessary, but not sufficient. One might liken that strategy to attempting to remove a large tree by flailing at the branches. The trunk, the base of the plant, is the place to attack. When that goes, the rest will wither on its own.

There is no use pushing this metaphor too far, of course. What it does imply is the need to address the issue of racism at a material, rather than merely an ideological, level. This is easier to prescribe than to implement, of course. Yet the history of the United States, as one example, lends some weight to the idea that legal and financial reform—and enforcement—have been far more effective than rhetoric and appeals to conscience alone. We shall return to this issue below.

The idea of “enforcement” may set off alarm bells. One can predict that many would object that the law cannot determine what people think. This is true, of course; but social sanctions can affect, and respond to, what people *do*. And social sanctions, both positive and negative, can be legitimate expressions of the will of society in a collective sense. Rather than simple top-down coercion, it can be the expression of a collective will to ensure that the weak among us are not easy prey for the rapacious. It can be the manifestation of a society in which the determination of the people is to protect and nurture their own.

Legal and Economic Issues

It might seem troubling to invoke the coercive power of a state system to address a social issue. On the other hand, we might recall that racism in its American version is largely a *product* of state phenomena, involving competing interest groups and power relations that have allowed and maintained racist practices.

North Americans did not suddenly discover the moral problems arising from slavery just before the Civil War. Abolitionists had made this point vociferously for generations. Thomas Jefferson wrestled with the contradictions of owning slaves, being aware of what he readily defined as the evils and injustice of slavery, fathering children with one of his slaves, but keeping his slaves in bondage. England outlawed the African slave trade early in the nineteenth century, after having benefited from it immensely at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, but England continued to exploit African slavery long after abolishing the trade because its cotton mills relied on the Southern plantation system of the United States—an early example of the “outsourcing” on which so many transnational corporations rely today. Nonetheless, English public opinion did turn against slavery early in the nineteenth century.

The myth of happy, simple-minded African slaves benefiting from their first exposure to Christianity and civilization provided a benign illusion. Yet documentation, even photographs, of plantation cruelties and the deep fear of slave uprisings lying just below the surface of plantation life offered ample contradictions to these bucolic fantasies. Archaeological excavations of slave burials in recent years have yielded ample evidence of the brutality of slave life. Broken and poorly healed bones, stress fractures, malnutrition, and a high mortality rate among children tell their own stories. At last, only the Civil War, a bloody national nightmare that littered farm fields from Pennsylvania to Florida with corpses, could end legal slavery in the United States. For those who would argue that slavery would soon have ended anyway, we need only recall the bitter struggle that slaveholding states carried on to retain it and extend it into new regions.

Some writers have pointed out the economic inefficiency of slavery, compared to other exploitative labor practices.²¹ Slave holders were obliged to maintain their work force with food and housing, however minimal these might have been, to keep valuable property from dying. An employer who is able to hire labor whenever he happens to need it has an economic advantage. When the task is completed, the employer can dismiss the workers, who must then keep themselves alive in the hope of future employment. This, of course, works best when a sizeable underemployed work force is

available—a “reserve army of labor.” The employer can then set the terms of employment, offering minimal wages, knowing that if one worker refuses, another who is still more desperate will accept. This pattern has persisted in many parts of the world, including the American South, in the aftermath of slavery. If workers acted in concert, they might exert some counterpressure on the employers. This, no doubt, is one reason why unions and other forms of labor organization in the South, and more recently in other parts of the country, have been anathema to such employers, who have sometimes suppressed these developments with violence or other coercive measures.

In the direct aftermath of the Civil War, bitter resistance to the freedom of ex-slaves in the South continued for generations. Beyond merely settling into a phase of labor exploitation, the South underwent a period of racial violence that continued a century after the war and has not disappeared even now, despite hopeful rhetoric about the “New South.” Part of the reason was a failure on the part of the national government to continue legal and economic measures to end racist practices. Nor, as we have noted, have other parts of the country been without problems.

Over and above post-Civil War debates about the extent to which the victorious U.S. government should enact punitive measures against the rebellious states, federal law gave freed slaves the right to vote, and as a result, many ex-slaves were elected to political office and began to demand rights that many Southern “whites” found threatening. With the assassination of President Lincoln and the succession to office of Andrew Johnson, who held deeply racist views, the era of “reconstruction” gave way to the era of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the entrenchment of discriminatory practices, and public intimidation and lynchings of ex-slaves and their descendants.

Adaptive Racism

By the latter part of the twentieth century, despite the persistence of raw, unabashed racism in some quarters, public expressions of racism had become less acceptable. Conservative voices have grumbled about the rise of “political correctness” that discourages the untrammelled expression of bigotry, but these complaints have tended to overlook the fact that in previous times, denigration of African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and other “nonwhite” groups had not only been politically “correct” but socially acceptable and commonplace.

With the old-fashioned racist vocabulary out of style, however, other terminology has often served the same functions. Ironically, as we have seen, the term “culture” has sometimes filled this purpose. The concept of culture in the social sciences, and particularly in anthropology, where it first became

a central idea in the late nineteenth century, was an implicit rebuttal to racist assumptions. It emphasized the significance of learning and experience in shaping behavior, rather than attributing characteristics to innate, inherited, and relatively fixed "racial" identity. In the late twentieth century, however, in the minds of some, culture came to be seen as an all but indelible stamp that differentiates one population from another in profound ways. Rather than implying the basic interchangeability of humans at birth, the new and rather perverse meaning of "culture" began to suggest the deep incompatibility of different ethnic traditions and the people who share different cultural heritages. Different cultures in some ways came to seem mutually inscrutable.

Such shifts have made racism an elusive target. The terms may change, perhaps giving the impression that the old problems have disappeared, when in fact they have merely acquired protective coloration through semantic camouflage. For these reasons, as we suggested above, public education and increased sensitivity on these issues are necessary, but inadequate. As long as discrimination offers rewards—even if these may be illusory—it will continue to draw social energy and produce its own reason for being. As Robert J. C. Young has written,

As so often with social issues, instead of being abandoned altogether, the scientific arguments in support of racial prejudice moved elsewhere, to the theory of "types," to questions of psychological, intellectual, and "moral" differences, to the terrifying ideas of social Darwinism and eugenics, and the adaptation of evolutionary theory to ideas of social supremacy and the extinction of races.²²

As we have seen, more than half a century after *Brown v. Board of Education*, many public schools are more segregated now than they were at the time of the ruling, with some of the most segregated cities in the Northeast and the Midwest. The life expectancy of African American males has actually dropped in the past decade or two. Unemployment among African Americans and Native Americans remains far above the national average.

In the early years of the twenty-first century there are signs that even some of the tentative advances of previous decades are under threat. Public schools continue to depend on local property taxes, ensuring that the poorest neighborhoods will also have the poorest schools. The current political climate in Washington does not appear conducive to an increase in federal assistance for impoverished public school systems. Recent policy changes have even raised eligibility requirements for food stamps. African Americans

constitute a disproportionate part of the prison population, and in many states their conviction will keep them from ever being able to vote. And affirmative action remains under fire.

These trends may not necessarily indicate the future. As we have seen, advances have happened in the past, often in the face of great odds and powerful forces; but complacency allows such forces to push advances back. We saw in earlier chapters that racism is not a universal or inevitable part of the human experience. We have no reason accept it, live with it, or tolerate it.

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Notes

Preface

1. Michael Banton, *The International Politics of Race* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).
2. C. Loring Brace, *"Race" is a Four-Letter Word: The Genesis of the Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), viii.
3. See, for example, J. Philippe Rushton, *Race, Evolution, and Behavior: A Life History Perspective* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Charles A. Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004).
4. See, for example, C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1970); Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humber River, and Wave Hill Stations* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1991); Richard J. Perry, *From Time Immemorial: Indigenous Peoples and State Systems* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 161–198.
5. See Amnesty International, "Australia: Deaths in Custody: How Many More?" AI Index: ASA 12/004 (1997).
6. Frank Dikötter, ed., *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); *Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing Co., 1997).

Chapter 1

1. See Richard C. Lewontin, P. R. Rose, and L. S. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Richard C. Lewontin, "The Apportionment of Human Diversity," in *Evolutionary Biology* 6 (1972): 381–398.
2. Noted in Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 67.
3. Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, 6th edition (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 1997) [orig. 1942].
4. See Rob DeSalle and Michael Yudell, *Welcome to the Genome: A User's Guide to the Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Wiley, 2005), 81–94, for a fuller discussion of this.

5. As we shall discuss in a later chapter, the “polygenists” argued that Africans and other “races” had arisen from separate creations and did not spring from Adam and Eve. This would seem to have been a congenial view for those who held that Africans were inferior, though it met with much resistance in slaveholding states of the South—mainly because it departed from a literal interpretation of the Bible.
6. “L’homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, edited with an introduction and notes by Ronald Grimsley (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972), [orig. 1762], I, chapter 1.
7. Homer G. Barnett, in his classic *Innovation: The Basis of Culture Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), explored the psychological processes involved in innovation, essentially seeing them as recombining existing elements in different relationships. Barnett focused on the innovative process itself rather than the reasons for acceptance or rejection of novelty, although numerous other researchers have addressed the social and cultural repercussions of innovation. Barnett’s work remains nearly unique, since few researchers in anthropology have pursued his line of inquiry.
8. See, for example Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians: Aboriginal Traditional Life: Past and Present* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1992); Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); W. E. H. Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1989).
9. According to a CBS News poll taken during November 18–21, 2004, only 13 percent of the sample representing “all Americans” felt that God was not involved in human evolution. Of the same general sample, 55 percent agreed with the statement that “God created humans in their present form” (CBS News website).
10. For a good translation of such a creation story, see Paul G. Zolbrod, trans., *Diné Bahane’: The Navajo Creation Story* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
11. The British explorer John Ross encountered some Polar Inuit in 1817 in northern Greenland near Cape York. They remained quite isolated for decades after that, however. The Danish explorer and ethnographer Knud Rasmussen many decades later was able to confirm the existence of these “legendary” inhabitants of the far Arctic.
12. Colin Turnbull’s account of the Ik of northeastern Uganda suggests such a situation. See Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972).
13. James Brunet (Lord Monboddo), *Of the Origins and Progress of Language* (Edinburgh: J. Balfour and T. Cadell, 1774).
14. As we shall see in a later chapter, Samuel Stanhope Smith seems to have held such a view. In the late eighteenth century, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a prominent American physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote a paper for the American Philosophical Society titled “Observations Intended to

- Favor a Supposition that the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes Is Derived from the Leprosy," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 4 (1779): 289–297.
15. Nicholas Wade, *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of Our Ancestors* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
 16. Sometimes known as the "Age of Reason," the Enlightenment's roots lie in the numerous pioneering scientific inquiries that flourished in the wake of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. In Chapter 5 we will discuss these developments more fully.
 17. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection with Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton, 1876).
 18. Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).
 19. This has been a central position of most American anthropologists influenced by Franz Boas, who many consider to be the "father of American anthropology." His students included such figures as Ruth Benedict, Robert H. Lowie, A. L. Kroeber, and Melville Herskovits. Most British anthropologists, beginning in the early twentieth century, tended to focus on social and cultural issues and essentially ignore human biology.
 20. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894) [orig. 1690].
 21. See for example Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (New York: Free Press, 1938) [orig. 1895].
 22. Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1965); *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957).
 23. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1966); *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); "Social Structure," in A. L. Kroeber, ed. *Anthropology Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 524–553.
 24. E. O. Wilson, for example, has argued that inherited characteristics may be more or less frequent in different populations. See Wilson, *Sociobiology*, 1975.
 25. Levi-Strauss spent many years analyzing myth from a structural perspective. See, for example, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); *From Honey to Ashes* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).
 26. See for example Harlan Lane, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
 27. Alexandre Dumas, *The Corsican Brothers* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber, 1845).
 28. See Leon J. Kamin, *The Science of Politics and IQ* (Potomac, MD: Erlbaum, 1974).
 29. Jonathan Marks offers a good discussion of this in *Human Biodiversity: Genes, Race, and History* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).
 30. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (New York: Current Literature, 1909).
 31. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930).

32. Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative: A Personal Inquiry into the Animal Origins of Property and Nations* (New York: Atheneum, 1966).
33. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Bantam, 1970).
34. Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
35. William Shockley won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1956 as a result of his work in developing the transistor. Konrad Lorenz won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1973.
36. The United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Australia spring to mind, though there are many other examples.
37. Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983).
38. See, for example, William Shockley and Roger Pearson, *Shockley on Eugenics and Race: The Application of Science to the Solution of Human Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Scott-Townsend, 1992).
39. See, for example, Arthur Jensen, "Race and Genetics of Intelligence: A Reply to Lewontin," in N. J. Block and Gerald Dworkin, eds., *The IQ Controversy: Critical Readings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 93–106.
40. Charles A. Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
41. Numerous statistics demonstrate that most violent crimes occur in underprivileged neighborhoods, with residents of these areas the most frequent victims.
42. See Richard J. Perry, *From Time Immemorial: Indigenous Peoples and State Systems* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) for a fuller discussion of this.
43. According to Brent Staples, columnist for the *New York Times*, "Black Indians have largely disappeared from frontier history, but a determined group has refused to go quietly into oblivion. One of them, a soft-spoken Head Start teacher named Sylvia Davis, has battled the federal government and the Seminole tribe in court for nearly a decade, trying to secure for black Seminoles the federally financed benefits enjoyed by nonblack Seminoles...When she challenged rules that barred blacks from receiving benefits, some other members told her to "go back to Africa" and referred to the black Seminoles as "cattle" while mooing and stamping their feet in the meeting hall. Ms. Davis was threatened with death after she persuaded a young civil rights lawyer, Jon Velie, to file the first of several suits against the tribe. . . ." *New York Times*, November 18, 2003, 24.

Chapter 2

1. Charles R. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859).
2. *National Geographic* 206, no. 4 (November 2004).
3. *Natural History* 111 (April 2002).

4. The most prominent organization representing public arguments for Intelligent Design is the Discovery Institute, located in Seattle, Washington.
5. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).
6. Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (London: W. Washington, 1695).
7. See, for example, Peter J. Bowler, *Theories of Human Evolution: A Century of Debates, 1844–1944* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
8. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).
9. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
10. Georges Cuvier (1769–1832).
11. Charles Lyell, *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man, with Remarks on Theories of the Origin of Species by Variation* (London: John Murray, 1863).
12. Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15–16.
13. George R. Glidden (1809–1857).
14. James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth, with Proofs and Illustrations* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1795).
15. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1850).
16. See Pat Shipman, *The Man Who Found the Missing Link: Eugene DuBois and His Lifelong Quest to Prove Darwin Right*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).
17. See Noel T. Boaz and Russell L. Ciochon, *Dragon Bone Hill: An Ice-Age Saga of Homo erectus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
18. The major work in exposing the hoax through improved dating was carried out by Kenneth Oakley. See Kenneth Oakley, *Piltdown Man* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955).
19. See Henry Gee, “Box of Bones ‘Clinches’ Identity of Piltdown Paleontology Hoaxer,” *Nature* 381 (May 23, 1996): 261–262.
20. Franz Boas, *Abstracts on the Report on Changes in Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912).
21. *Ibid.*, 22.
22. Later refinements in statistics, in fact, have shown that in using only two non-adaptive variables (head width and head length), Boas could not have achieved results that were statistically significant. I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer of this manuscript.
23. Corey S. Sparks and Richard L. Jantz, “Changing Times, Changing Faces: Franz Boas’s Immigrant Study in Modern Perspective,” *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (2003): 333–337. Sparks and Jantz also relied on the same two nonadaptive variables.
24. *Ibid.*, 334.
25. Clarence C. Gravlee, H. Russell Bernard, and William R. Leonard, “Boas’s *Changes in Bodily Form*: The Immigrant Study, Cranial Plasticity, and Boas’s Physical Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 2 (2003): 326–332.
26. Sparks and Jantz, “Changing Times, Changing Faces,” 334.
27. *Ibid.*, 335.

28. Gravelee et al., "Boas's *Changes in Bodily Form*," 331.
29. See, for example, Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz, "Hominids and Hybrids: The Place of Neanderthals in Human Evolution," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 96, no. 13 (June 22, 1999): 7117–7119.
30. Some writers now prefer the term "hominin."
31. See, for example, C. Loring Brace, *The Stages of Human Evolution*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); Chris Stringer, *The Complete World of Human Evolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005); Noel Boaz and Alan J. Almquist, *Biological Anthropology: A Synthetic Approach to Human Evolution* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall), 312–318.
32. One basis for this is that the remains of this form have been associated with the remains of other animals, implying an omnivorous diet consistent with that of modern humans, although it is not entirely clear whether these australopithecines were hunters, scavengers, or victims of predators.
33. Although the name "Olduvai" has become established, the term refers to a type of plant growing in the area which local people refer to as *oldupai*.
34. See P. Mellars, "'Acculturation,' 'Co-existence' and the End of the Neanderthals," *Journal of Human Evolution* 36 (1999): A13; Richard G. Klein, "Paleoanthropology: Whither the Neanderthals?" *Science* 299 (March 2003): 1525–1527.
35. See Rainer Grün and Alan Thorne, "Dating the Ngandong Humans," *Science* 276 (June 1997): 1575; and Carl Swisher III, W. Jack Rink, Henry P. Schwarcz, and Susan C. Antón, "Response," *Science* 276 (June 1997): 1575–1576.
36. T. Jacob, E. Indriati, R. P. Soejono, K. Hsu, D. W. Frayer, R. B. Eckhardt, A. J. Kuperavage, A. Thorne, and M. Henneberg, "Pygmoid Australomelanesian *Homo sapiens* Skeletal Remains from Liang Bua, Flores: Population Affinities and Pathological Abnormalities," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 103, no. 36 (September 2006): 13421–13426.
37. R. Singer and J. J. Wymer, *The Middle Stone Age of Klasies River Mouth in South Africa*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); F. E. Grine, O. M. Pearson, R. G. Klein, and G. P. Rightmire, "Additional Human Fossils from Klasies River Mouth South Africa," *Journal of Human Evolution* 35, no. 1 (1998): 95–107.
38. C. Loring Brace, "Australian Tooth Size and the Death of a Stereotype," *Current Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (1980): 141–164.
39. On the differences between Neandertal and modern facial features, Erik Trinkhaus observes that modern humans show a far more radical departure from the hominid norm than Neandertals, noting that "it is not the Neandertals who appear unusual, special, derived, autpomorphous. It is we." Erik Trinkhaus, "Modern Human versus Neandertal Evolutionary Distinctiveness," *Current Anthropology* 47, no. 4 (2006): 569–595, 607.
40. J. D. Clark, Y. Beyene, G. WoldeGabriel, W. Har, P. Renne, H. Gilbert, A. Defleur, G. Suwa, S. Katoh, K. R. Ludwig, J. R. Boissarie, B. Asfaw, and T. D. White, "Stratigraphic, Chronological and Behavioral Contexts of Pleistocene *Homo sapiens* from Middle Awash, Ethiopia," *Nature* 423 (2003): 747–752; C. B. Stringer, "Out of Ethiopia," *Nature* 423 (2003): 692–694; T. D. White, B. Ashfaw, D. DeGusta,

- H. Gilbert, G. D. Richard, G. Suwa, F. Clark Howell, "Pleistocene *Homo sapiens* from the Middle Awash, Ethiopia," *Nature* 423 (2003): 742–747.
41. I. McDougall, F. H. Brown, and J. G. Fleagle, "Stratigraphic Placement and Age of Modern Humans from Kibish, Ethiopia," *Nature* 433 (2005): 733–736.
 42. See Mellars, "Acculturation," and Klein, "Paleoanthropology."
 43. See John H. Relethford, "Ancient DNA and the Origin of Modern Humans," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98, no. 2 (January 2001): 390–391; Gregory J. Adcock, Elizabeth S. Dennis, Simon Easteal, Gavin A. Huttley, Lars S. Jermiin, W. James Peacock, and Alan Thorne, "Mitochondrial DNA Sequences in Ancient Australians: Implications for Modern Human Origins," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98 (2001): 537–542; D. Caramelli, C. Lalueza-Fox, C. Vernesi, M. Lari, A. Casoli, F. Mallegni, B. Chiarelli, I. Dupanloup, J. Bertranpetit, G. Barbujani, and G. Bertorelle, "Evidence for a Genetic Discontinuity between Neandertals and 24,000-Year-Old Anatomically Modern Europeans," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 100, no. 11 (May 2003): 6593–6597.
 44. Milford Wolpoff is among those who argue that some Neandertal genes did, in fact, enter the gene pool of modern Europeans. See Milford Wolpoff and Rachel Caspari, *Race and Human Evolution: A Fatal Attraction* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998). Recent DNA studies, however, have made this seem increasingly improbable. See Matthias Hoss, "Ancient DNA: Neanderthal Population Genetics," *Nature* 404 (March 2000): 453–454.
 45. M. Krings, A. Stone, R.W. Schmitz, H. Krainitzki, M. Stoneking, and S. Paabo, "Neandertal DNA Sequences and the Origins of Modern Humans," *Cell* 90(1997): 19–30.
 46. Carleton Coon, *The Origin of Races* (New York: Knopf, 1962).
 47. See Chris Stringer, "Anthropology: New Evidence for Out of Africa Model," *Nature* 438 (2005): 1099.
 48. See Rob De Salle and Michael Yudell, *Welcome to the Genome: A User's Guide to the Genetic Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Wiley), 25–39.
 49. C. Loring Brace, "Race" Is a Four-Letter Word: *The Genesis of the Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 250.
 50. See, for example, Arthur Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement," *Harvard Educational Review* 38, no. 1 (1969): 1–123, 1969; Charles A. Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
 51. Rick Weiss, "Beyond Nature vs. Nurture. Positive Environmental Factors Can Boost Poorer Students' IQ Scores, Researchers Show," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, September 8–14, 2005.
 52. *Ibid.*, 30.
 53. See, for example, DeSalle and Yudell, *Welcome to the Genome*, 14, 174. Mutations may be entirely random errors in replication or damage resulting from toxins or radiation. In either case mutations are likely to be random in their effects.

54. See, for example, P. Jeffrey Brantingham, "Measuring Forage Mobility," *Current Anthropology* 47, no. 3 (2006): 435–457.
55. See, for example, Charles E. Holmes, "Northern Athapaskan Environmental Systems in Diachronic Perspective," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 5, nos. 3–4 (1971): 92–124; Richard J. Perry, *Western Apache Heritage: People of the Mountain Corridor* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 77.
56. Julian Huxley seems to have introduced the term, writing "I propose the word *cline*, meaning a gradient in a measurable character." Julian Huxley, "Clines, an Auxiliary Taxonomic Principle," *Nature* 142 (1938): 219–220, 219. Cited by Brace in "*Race*" *Is a Four-Letter Word*, 65.
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Chapter 8

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